THE DARK TOWER

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

Stephen King's Magnum Opus
Comes To Marvel!

Series Creators Take You Inside the Making of Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born

- ***Robin Furth***
- ***Peter David***
- ***Jae Lee***
- ***Richard Isanove***
- ***...And Stephen King!***

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PLUGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The writers of ***Marvel Spotlight*** are proud to bring you up close to the creators behind Marvel's bold new take on Stephen King's ***Dark Tower*** epic in this special issue of ***Spotlight***!

I: Long Days And Pleasant Nights: An Open Letter From Stephen King

Stephen King opens up our special issue with a personal correspondence to ***Spotlight*** readers!

II: The Spotlight Interview With Robin Furth

The only person on the planet who knows more about the world of the Dark Tower than Stephen King himself, Robin Furth was King's right-hand gal that helped him stay on top of the labyrinthine world of Roland. Now, after delineating that world in her exhaustive ***Concordance*** tomes, she is helping King and Marvel develop the ***Dark Tower*** into what is sure to be the comic event of the decade. Robin is on board to help readers get a closer understanding of all things Mid-World in this extensive interview with ***Marvel Spotlight***.

Included in this section is a synopsis of the major characters and plots from all seven of the ***Dark Tower*** novels!

III: The Art of the *Dark Tower* With Jae Lee And Richard Isanove

Two of Marvel's elite artists are at the absolute top of their game with the ***Gunslinger Born***! Illustrator Jae Lee and colorist Richard Isanove are on hand to give personal testimony to the challenges involved in bringing King's world to visual life.

Also, ***Spotlight*** looks into their lives as working artists and the great works they've done for Marvel in the past, including Jae Lee's seminal work on ***Sentry*** and ***Inhumans***, and Richard Isanove's stunning work on ***Wolverine: Origin*** and Neil Gaiman's ***Marvel 1602***!

IV: The *Spotlight* Interview With Peter David

After twenty-five years as a writer for Marvel, Peter David has produced plenty of classic comics. But in 2007, he is taking on his highest profile project of them all: writing the scripts for Stephen King's ***Dark Tower***! ***Spotlight*** discusses his collaboration with Stephen King and Robin Furth, as well as his groundbreaking work on ***X-Factor*** and ***Incredible Hulk***!

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LONG DAYS and PLEASANT NIGHTS

Corresponding With **Stephen King**

The job was simple: *Marvel Spotlight*'s special *Dark Tower* issue was looming, and it was my task to conjure up a few questions for Stephen King. You know Stephen King? The man behind the *Dark Tower* novels and the upcoming Marvel adaptation/extension of the epic franchise? The writer responsible for so many haunting and terrifying (and, admittedly, thoroughly *delicious*) nightmares consumed over a lifetime of reading? The author who just happens to be literature's greatest living novelist? The guy who is lead guitarist for the Rock Bottom Remainders? Yeah...conjure up a few questions for *that* guy!

Some pertinent DT questions came quickly to mind: why does such an accomplished novelist turn to comics? And why with *Dark Tower*? And after *Dark Tower*, perhaps some other of your great novels might hit the comic scene? How's the project coming along?

And then an exploration into his comic fandom: favorite comics/creators then and now? What Marvel character would he write, if only he had the time/energy/desire? So many questions, and so many more you don't want to labor upon the guy who's probably in the middle of his next great work of fiction [*No "probably." He IS in the middle of his next great work of fiction! – Ed.*] After a period of fine-tuning and polishing comes the inevitable moment when you click 'Send' and your questions are e-mailed to the guy who wrote *The Stand* and *The Shining* and all those wonderful stories in *Night Shift* and *Different Seasons* and *ohmygod I just realized that's a collection of the most unacceptable questions ever asked of Stephen King!*

But you can't have it back. The e-mail is gone and it's now in the hands of the ticking clock on your desktop: all that's left is the wait for the scariest piece of Stephen King prose ever written: "Let's talk, you and I. Let's talk about you wasting my time with silly questions...!"

And then it came, only a short time later, actually ("Doesn't take that long to write a guy off," I thought), the e-mail of all e-mails to hit this editor's inbox. An e-mail from Stephen King – and one that defied all dread expectations! Of all the perks of being *Marvel Spotlight*'s lead writer, this was the perkiest: let me tell ya, a thoughtful and personal missive from Stephen King can really brighten up the gloomiest of days, and since I'm just a lucky fellow acting as the conduit through which Marvel fandom can wend its way straight to you, please consider this to be every bit the great Stephen King's direct correspondence to you!

Enjoy this special kick-off to this very special issue of *Marvel Spotlight* – certainly our biggest yet – as we look inside the *Dark* Tower. We start it off with a word from Stephen King...

Your pal in comics,

John Rhett Thomas

Marvel Spotlight

An open letter from

STEPHEN KING

Dear Spotlight,

I actually thought of doing this as a comic script – you and me kicking this thing around in a dusty desert barroom, perhaps in the town of Tull, with ole Sheb pounding out "Hey Jude" on the tinklebox, but then I started to see strange creatures in the corners...and a dust storm blowing up outside...and a Mutant Posse somewhere close at hand. Because that's how my mind works. Pretty soon it'd be a story, and then I'd be here all night. So a letter will have to do. A rambling one.

But a script would have been amusing, n'est-ce pas? Oh well.

I asked Chuck Verrill (agent) if he remembered how I wound up in bed with Marvel (with me it's always love, never business), and he says that at some point, when responding to a question about who he'd like to work with – maybe even in *Marvel Spotlight!* – Joe Quesada said, "Stephen King." This got back to me and I said to someone – maybe Chuck or Marsha DeFilippo (assistant) – that working with Marvel sounded like it would be the cat's meow. I mean, I grew up, but so did the comics, and I never really left them behind.

I don't know who suggested the *Dark Tower* books, but I latched on at once. Having read *Watchmen* and *Preacher* and *V for Vendetta*, I thought a graphic version of the *Tower* stories – or stories about Roland the gunslinger that had never been told – could work like a really cool movie, or a great TV miniseries.

THERE ARE SO MANY IDEAS, I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO TELL YOU. WHEN THE GRIM REAPER COMES FOR ME, I'LL PROBABLY SAY, "WAIT! WAIT! I GOTTA TELL YOU THE ONE ABOUT " AND SO ON. YADDA-YADDA-YADDA.

Also, I'm curious. I'm always curious, and open to seeing what new formats can do for old works. And the books are unimpeachable, beyond change (as long as the censors are kept at bay). So there's really no risk, is there? It's why I tend to say "yes" to a lot of movie offers, and why I okayed a kind of camp version of *Carrie* off-Broadway (not to mention an operatic version of *Dolores Claiborne* that someone's currently screwing around with in London). I mean, some of these things will probably suck, but who really cares? Readers can always go back to the books, which don't suck (some critics would beg to differ).

Plus! You always judge the talent involved. Right now there's a huge amount of talent in the graphic/comix world, and a lot of it's at Marvel. I talked with them about it, but I didn't really have to be persuaded; I know the market, after all. I've been reading Marvel since around the time Stan Lee started to shave. Nah...but I've been there since Jack Kirby was drawing *Fantastic Four*, and can remember when Spidey supplanted the gone-but-not-forgotten *Plastic Man* (and the immortal Woozy Winks) in my affections and regard.

Other novels I might consider (for future comic adaptations)? *Firestarter* would be a natural, but I don't know what the rights situation is. Original projects? You bet. I'd like to do a kickbutt, zombies-overrun-the-world story told from the viewpoint of several girls who start out as Valley Drones and become tough take-no-prisoners survivors. I'd like to tell a time-travel story where this guy finds a diner that connects to 1958...you always go back to the same day. So one day he goes back and just stays. Leaves his 2007 life behind. His goal? To get up to November 22, 1963, and stop Lee Harvey Oswald. He does, and he's convinced he's just FIXED THE WORLD. But when he goes back to '07, the world's a nuclear slag-heap. Not good to fool with Father Time. So then he has to go back again and stop himself...only he's taken on a fatal dose of radiation, so it's a race against time.

Or how about a suburban neighborhood where all the women are witches and the battle of good vs. evil is going on just below the surface of soccer games, car washes, and Tuesday night poker games (the guys are downstairs in the rec room, playing seven-card; the gals are in the backyard, calling up Nyarlahotep the Blind Fiddler from Beyond Space).

There are so many ideas, I can't even begin to tell you. When the Grim Reaper comes for me, I'll probably say, "Wait! Wait! I gotta tell you the one about..." And so on. Yadda-yadda-yadda.

Would I actually write any of these comics? Heck, yes. I like the process, which I've had a chance to watch close up during the creation of the *Dark Tower/Gunslinger* books. And it's close enough to screenwriting to make me believe I'd be comfortable with that process. Too many books to do, though, I guess, although the quality of the current DT series is totally gratifying. I've rarely felt so good about a project that was still in the process of creation. Jae Lee is amazing, and the quality of the writing – a team effort, and what a team – is high. I think the fans are going to be blown away.

And if I could write any Marvel comic, about any character? Spider-Man, of course. Peter Parker, the original Sufferin' Superhero. I'm not sure what I'd do with him...except I see a nervous breakdown...and a growing tangle of OCD behavior that can't be fixed with medication (screws up the powers, of course), and some tropical island rehab...an earthquake, of course...or maybe a volcano...a growing belief that if he doesn't touch the door exactly twenty-three times before leaving his condo, the world will end...oh, and a sense that the costume is getting tighter...making it hard to breathe...

Stuff like that. Lots more. But I gotta go before this gets serious. Long days and pleasant nights, and may ya do well.

Stephen King

THE **SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW** WITH

ROBIN FURTH

To you and me, it's *Mister* Stephen King, but to Robin Furth, he's just plain old Steve. Marvel Spotlight caught up with the novelist's right-hand gal, Robin Furth, who has been helping the author sort through Roland's back pack for nearly ten years! A talented writer in her own right, Robin has been tasked with helping shepherd the *Dark Tower* through development at Marvel, and along with her fellow collaborators Peter David, Jae Lee, Richard Isanove and Stephen King himself (that's *Mister* Stephen King to you and me!), she is taking King's opus to innovative new heights.

SPOTLIGHT: To start, please tell us a little about your background, and how you came to be associated with Stephen King and the *Dark Tower*.

ROBIN: I was born and raised in a town called Upper Darby, just outside of Philadelphia. Even though I grew up in Pennsylvania, my heart always belonged to the state of Maine, where I spent my summers at my grandparents' house. After finishing college I won a scholarship to study in England, where I met my husband Mark, who is English. After living in England for about three years we decided to move back to Maine.

By the time the late 90s rolled around, I was at the University of Maine doing work towards an individualized PhD in supernatural fiction. One of my supervisors was Burt Hatlen, who had been one of Steve's teachers and was still one of his friends. Burt knew I was a serious writer and that I really loved horror stories, and so when Steve told him that he was looking for someone to do some occasional work, Burt recommended me. The first thing I did for Steve was sort through the thousands of stories he received for *On Writing*. After I finished that job, I went into the Bangor office to pick up my paycheck and to see Marsha, who is Steve King's personal assistant. Coastal and central Maine had just suffered one of the worst ice storms in history and so I hadn't had power (or a shower) in a week. Needless to say, despite lots of bucket-baths I felt pretty grubby. Anyway, I ran into the office just before closing and who should be sitting there but the man himself – Steve King! I hadn't met Steve in person yet and was very embarrassed that I looked like I'd just rolled in from an extra-long camping trip. He obviously wasn't bothered since he asked me if I wanted to do some additional work.

What Steve asked me to do was to make lists of all the characters and important places in the first four *Dark Tower*

books, and to write down the pages where he could locate them. I hadn't read Steve's *Dark Tower* saga at that point, but I was a fan of his other books so I was really excited about the job. I don't think Steve had any idea what he was getting into at that point. Anyway, I started to make extensive lists of characters and places, but I couldn't resist collecting Mid-World games, Mid-World sayings, and adding bits of commentary to each entry. Before I handed in the final project I had it bound in black. The cover page was a door with a sigul on it, just like the one at the front of the first Concordance. I taped a key to the front of this proto-Concordance so that Steve would be able to unlock the magical door. Steve must have liked my enthusiastic silliness since after that he began handing me his manuscript in installments so that I could continue expanding my work.

While Steve was working on the final three books of the series we started to have a really good email conversation. We were both living in Mid-World, so you can imagine what our exchanges were like. Occasionally Steve would hit a stumbling block and I'd receive a question like, "Robin, what does Jake have in his backpack?" My first reaction would be panic. I had no idea. But then I'd go back through the books, paying special attention to what Jake shoved into his bag and what he took out, what he kept and what he lost. There were many other such brain-teasers, the result of which is that I know the *Dark Tower* books inside and out.

SPOTLIGHT: Sounds like a dream come true! And your job survived the fall of the Tower?

ROBIN: It certainly was – and is – a dream come true. In fact, I still sometimes have to pinch myself, just to make sure that I'm awake, if you know what I mean!

While working on the *Concordances*, I occasionally took time off from the Tower to do research for Steve's other books. Since Roland reached his goal I've continued to do this kind of research, though on a freelance basis. (This works well for me since I'm heavily involved with the Marvel project and also trying to finish up a novel of my own.) One of my more recent jobs was cell-phone research. (You can guess which book that was for!) Since I've never owned a cell phone (just don't trust 'em), I had a lot of learning to do, but in the end I got to where I needed to go. What was really interesting though was to see what Steve did with the work I handed to him. As always, he really surprised me.

One of my favorite smaller research jobs came early on during my employment. Steve asked me to go to New York so that I could go through the Public Library's archives and find articles about Albert Fish, the child-eating cannibal that Steve King and Peter Straub referred to in *Black House*.

My grandfather and father both worked in pathology departments, so it takes a lot to gross me out or disturb me, but with Albert Fish I think I met my match. The strangest thing about that job – and I'll probably sound pretty nuts when I say this – is that I started to have really bad nightmares two nights before I even knew about the assignment. In the worst of those dreams I actually thought I was awake. I was lying in bed, next to my husband, when I felt something crawl onto my chest. Since it was dark I couldn't see what had crawled on top of me, but when I felt its hairless feet I realized that it was a giant rat! With one hand I held the monster's feet and with the other I had to hold its snout as far away as possible – it wanted to chew my face off. Luckily my husband woke me up before the thing could get a good chomp. To this day I'm convinced that Albert Fish – in his true rat form – paid me a little visit.

SPOTLIGHT: The *Dark Tower* has an interesting history. I understand that when Stephen started writing it, he didn't think it would have wide-spread popular appeal?

ROBIN: It's funny...in many ways the *Dark Tower* books are Steve's "cult classics," and as such they have a really devoted following. However there are many hard-core Stephen King fans out there –people who've read practically everything else he's written–who still haven't cracked a single volume of Roland's tale. I think this prejudice is shifting, but I still meet fans who for some reason are wary of Roland's world. Perhaps this is because in the Dark Tower books, Steve moves from the more–or–less realistic settings of the traditional supernatural tale into the pure realm of fantasy.

In the majority of Steve's books, we begin in a world we recognize.

OF ALL STEVE'S NOVELS, IT'S THE ONE THAT HAS OBSESSED HIM THE LONGEST. HE'S SPENT THIRTY YEARS IN ROLAND'S WORLD, AND NO MATTER HOW YOU COUNT THEM, THAT'S MANY LONG DAYS AND PLEASANT NIGHTS, AS THEY SAY IN MID–WORLD.

Whether that world is Derry, Maine, or the Overlook Hotel, it doesn't matter. We meet ordinary people in ordinary settings who are about to have some really extraordinary experiences. Although many of Steve's characters have unusual psychic abilities, they remain part of a world we know. However in the Dark Tower books, Roland's post-apocalyptic desert landscape – full of magic and mutants and abandoned technology – is the primary reality. Our world is secondary.

Even in terms of its original inspiration and its publishing history, the Dark Tower books have a kind of cult status. Steve started Roland's tale back in about 1970, inspired by such diverse influences as The Lord of the Rings and Sergio Leone's spaghetti Westerns. However after writing the first sections of The Gunslinger, he plopped the manuscript into a box and hid it in the garage where it sustained some pretty severe water damage. He pulled it out again around 1977 and showed it to his agent who sold it as a series of stories to The

Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. (They appeared between 1978 and 1981.) Although Steve had already had incredible success with Carrie and The Stand (among others),when The Gunslinger was finally published in book form it was printed in a limited edition of 10,000 copies, 500 of which were signed and numbered.

Although I think Steve did have doubts about the appeal Roland would have to a larger audience, I think that as the years go by Roland will become more and more popular. Of all Steve's novels, it's the one that has obsessed him the longest. He's spent thirty years in Roland's world, and no matter how you count them, that's many long days and pleasant nights, as they say in Mid-World. And even if Steve didn't feel completely sure of its popularity, he's had enough faith in the story itself to see it through to the very end. If you think about the whole series as one long book – that's a tale of over 3,000 pages! Pretty amazing!

SPOTLIGHT: As the series progressed, the publication gaps grew. Then, after the fourth volume, Stephen had his famous accident, where he was nearly killed by an inattentive driver while walking along a country road. He then finished the remaining books in very short order, becoming a significant character in the story himself, and his accident became a major plot point. What effect did the accident have on the series, and how much did it change his plans for how the story would progress?

ROBIN: To tell you the truth, I don't know how much the accident changed Steve's plans for how the story would progress. I entered the Dark Tower universe after the accident, so the tale that I saw unfold was very much the one told by a writer who had been through a serious trauma. His accident became part of the tale, just as the Dark Tower books were an intrinsic part of his physical healing. (He was in a lot of pain while writing those final novels.)

Steve always maintained that Roland's whole story had been sitting in his head for years; all he had to do was sit down and write it out. This makes me think that the basic outline remained the same, despite the accident. However, I have to add that many of the events that happened along the way – including the deaths of Roland's dear companions Jake and Eddie – took Steve by surprise. Perhaps it's safe to say that Steve knew basically where he was going, but that he had to plan his route day by day. I suppose stories always have to maintain a certain flexibility. That way they continue to surprise and delight their writers. After a while both characters and stories develop their own ka, and they can be pretty headstrong.

I think that perhaps Steve always planned to enter the Dark Tower novels. However the way that he entered was determined by fate. Steve was hit by a car, and so that car accident became an integral part of his magnum opus. What I find so interesting about the final book of the Dark Tower series is the way that Steve rewrites his near-death experience. Only when he rewrites it, two of his main characters – Roland and Jake – are there to witness it. As those who've already read the novel know, Roland's twelve-year-old companion Jake saves Steve's life at the cost of his own. (Jake steps out in front of the

oncoming van so that his own body takes the brunt of the impact.) Jake sacrifices his life for Steve so that the Dark Tower books can be finished and so that the Dark Tower itself will remain standing. To Jake, it's a cause worth dying for.

I can't help but think that Jake's sacrifice - both in terms of plot and symbolism – is extremely important. Steve's characters - and the Dark Tower books themselves – got Steve through what would have been an almost unbearable experience. Perhaps when Steve traveled to Mid-World the pain in his hip and leg eased a bit. And perhaps writing itself – not just his need to write but the books' need to be written – helped him explain why he had survived. I think that we all develop secret mythologies like that. They keep us going.

SPOTLIGHT: The ending of The Dark Tower, which circles back to the beginning of The Gunslinger and turns the entire series into an endless cycle, was controversial. Was that always the plan?

ROBIN: As Steve wrote in his author's note at the end of the final book of the Dark Tower series, making Roland's story into an endless cycle might not have been the most popular ending, but it was the right ending. It was what he saw unfold before his inner eye when Roland reached that final field of singing red roses in which the Dark Tower stands.

From my experience working with Steve, and from Steve's many discussions about writing, it seems pretty apparent to me that he doesn't work with a hard and fast outline or plan. Or at least not a conventional sort of outline. As he has stated on numerous occasions, he likes to fly by the seat of his pants! That's not to say that he begins a book without a powerful vision. Not at all. Rather, he's reeling in a big fish, and since he's seen the fish leaping out of the water he knows how big it is and the various techniques he can use to land it. He knows that he's eventually going to get it into the boat, but exactly how the battle progresses depends on the temperament of the fish. It's a two way street. And to tell the truth, no matter how many times you've stared at that fish and how much you've studied the way it swims you don't know what catching it will be like until you've actually hooked it onto the end of your line.

I think that Steve came to the final books of the Dark Tower series with an overall vision – he knew Roland's personality, his history, where he needed to get to and the general landscape he had to traverse to arrive at his goal – but the day by day travels were documented in the act of writing. Steve has a powerful intuition – one of the best I've ever seen – and his intuition is what guides him as he writes. I remember reading once about Steve's experience with outlines. He actually stated that when he tried to stick to a pre-set course of events the story died. He just couldn't breathe life into a dead thing that was so formal, so structured. In order to live the book needs to be free to morph under the pen of its creator. I for one find that a much more exciting way to write. And if you ask me, it's this wild intuition and willingness to take risks that makes Steve's work so popular. So, while writing the Dark Tower series Steve was both telling us a story he already knew and experiencing

COSMOLOGY OF MID-WORLD

This explanation of Mid-World should be seen as metaphysical, not literal. There are twelve Portals, arranged in a circle like the numbers on a clock. There are six Beams, or lines of force, connecting the Portals opposite each other. Where the Beams meet in the center is a thirteenth portal, the Dark Tower. The Beams hold all worlds in place, while keeping them separate. They can be sensed in all worlds by some people. The Dark Tower is the center of all worlds. The Portals are gateways to and from other worlds. Lesser gateways also exist, guarded by demons.

All-World is divided into three regions: In-World, End-World, and Mid-World. Also, the terms In-World and Out-World can be used as relative or directional terms, much like Uptown and Downtown. Mid-World often seems used for the whole. Roland's homeland of Gilead is located in In-World, and the Dark Tower at End-World. All-World and our world are each special; the Dark Tower exists in each, as a tower in Roland's world, and as a rose in ours. It is ruled by the Crimson King, the arch-villain of the series, who is also imprisoned there.

At some point in the distant past, the denizens of All-World replaced the eternal magic that kept the Beams going with fallible technology. They also built great mechanical creatures to guard the Beams. Then, this civilization destroyed itself in a cataclysm, leaving no one to maintain them. The Beams are failing. Worlds are falling apart, and blurring together. In-World was the first to "move on," and Roland is a refugee from it.

BOOK 1: THE GUNSLINGER

Roland of Gilead pursues the Man in Black across a vast wasteland where worlds seem to blur together. As he travels, we learn episodes from his past in Gilead, where he was trained as a Gunslinger and his family was betrayed by the Man in Black. We see his terrible skills as a killer, and the harsh training as a boy by which he learned them. He seeks a place called the Dark Tower, for reasons we do not know. Along the way, he meets a boy named Jake who died in our world – while the Man in Black watched – and was reborn in this one. Although Roland and Jake grow close, Roland is tormented by the growing knowledge that he will have to choose between his quest for the Tower and Jake. Jake senses it as well, and when the moment of decision comes, Roland chooses the quest. Jake's last words are, "Go then. There are other worlds than these." Finally, Roland catches up with the Man in Black, who gives him a tarot reading filled with vague prophecies (to be fulfilled in later books). Then, Roland sleeps for what seems like ten years, awakening to a cold campfire and bones that may or may not be the Man in Black's.

THE DARK TOWER SAGA – AND THE DARK TOWER ITSELF – REALLY IS THE LYNCH-PIN OF STEVE'S MYTHICAL UNIVERSE. ONCE YOU KNOW THE DARK TOWER BOOKS YOU GET A REAL INSIGHT INTO HIS OTHER SHORT STORIES AND NOVELS.

a story which was completely fresh and which was unfolding as he watched. Does this make sense? It's hard to explain that balance, but I think all writers go through something similar. It's really hard to stick to a hard and fast outline when the characters keep jumping up off the page and doing things you don't expect but which are thoroughly fascinating.

SPOTLIGHT: One interesting facet of the Dark Tower series is the extent to which it is intertwined with King's other works. Several significant plot-points for the series take place in other books, although he is always careful to structure them so that the reader doesn't need one to understand the other, and important characters often move back and forth between the Dark Tower books and other works. One could almost suggest that the Dark Tower series comprises not simply the seven books and the odd short story, but much if not all of King's body of work.

ROBIN: I think you are 100% correct. The Dark Tower saga - and the Dark Tower itself – really is the lynch-pin of Steve's mythical universe. Once you know the Dark Tower books you get a real insight into his other short stories and novels.

When I talk about the Dark Tower books, I mean the seven books and one short story in the series: The Gunslinger, The Drawing of the Three, The Waste Lands, Wizard and Glass, Wolves of the Calla, Song of Susannah, The Dark Tower, and The Little Sisters of Eluria. However, I think you can also include a number of other novels and stories in this group: Eyes of the Dragon, Insomnia, It, Hearts in Atlantis, Everything's Eventual and Salem's Lot, to name just a few. You also have to acknowledge the profound importance of both The Talisman and Black House, co-written with Peter Straub.

Even in books that seem to be unrelated to the Dark Tower cycle, many of the underlying mythical structures remain the same. We have the repeating theme of multiple, connected worlds, many of which echo each other. And of a cosmic battle between light and dark. In the Dark Tower books these forces are called the "White" and the "Outer Dark." In the novel Insomnia, they are called the "Purpose" and the "Random."

SPOTLIGHT: When King resumed work on the series after his accident, one thing he did was rewrite The Gunslinger, both bringing the general tone more in line with subsequent volumes, and actually adding or changing material to alter the story somewhat. Why did he believe this was necessary?

ROBIN: I think Steve felt that The Gunslinger was written by a much younger man, one who hadn't honed his craft yet. He also wanted to tie that first book more closely to the later volumes. In the 2003

BOOK 2: THE DRAWING OF THE THREE

Roland's journey now takes him along an endless beach, where he fights lobster-like monsters that cost him part of his right hand, reducing his shooting capacity in half. Along the way are three doorways into another world – our world – through which he must pass. Beyond the first, he meets Eddie, a heroin addict and Mafia drug-runner; having little to hold him in his world, he joins Roland's quest. Through the second, he meets Odetta, a black woman from the early 60s who lost her legs when pushed in front of a subway train. Odetta is unknowingly burdened with a violent alternate personality, Detta. When Eddie and Roland bring her to the beach, rational Odetta thinks she is dreaming, and mad Detta schemes to kill them. And through the third door they meet Jack Mort, the Pusher, who caused the childhood injury that split Detta from Odetta, and later pushed her in front of the subway train. He was also the one who killed Jake. Roland helps Eddie overcome his addiction, and helps Odetta and Detta acknowledge each others existence, allowing them to fuse into a new, healthier personality, Susannah. Together, they are able to overcome Mort (who dies under the wheels of a subway train). Together, they become a ka-tet, a group sharing a common destiny. And together, they will continue Roland's quest for the Dark Tower.

version of The Gunslinger, there are quite a few subtle but profound changes. For example, we discover that Sheb - the piano player at Sheb's honky-tonk in the town of Tull – is the same Sheb who worked at the Travelers' Rest in Hambry in Wizard and Glass. In the rewritten book, Susan Delgado plays a larger part in Roland's memories, and his friend Alain (whom we meet in Wizard and Glass) is mentioned. (In the original version of the book Roland mentions a friend named Alan, not Alain.)

In the new version of The Gunslinger, Steve begins to prepare us for the fact that Roland's journey is cyclical. Although Roland thinks he is beginning his search for the Man in Black and the Tower for the first time, Steve drops quite a few hints that let us know that something much more mysterious is going on. If you go back and reread the 2003 version of The Gunslinger after finishing the rest of the series, you'll see what I mean.

BOOK 3: THE WASTE LANDS

Roland, Eddie, and Susannah have gone Out-World, and after fighting a giant mechanical bear, one of the ancient Guardians of the Beams, they discover a Beam and endeavor to follow it in-world to the Dark Tower, which lies where all Beams converge. Along the way, they encounter another Jake, who in our world was haunted by memories of a death that never happened, and who found a gateway into Mid-World. On the Mid-World side of the gate, Susannah buys safe passage for Jake by sleeping with the guardian demon. Now numbering four (or five, counting Oy, a semi-intelligent creature who becomes Jake's pet/companion), Roland's ka-tet continues its journey. After numerous adventures, they arrive at a ruined city called Lud, and find a monorail station occupied by an intelligent (and by now insane) train named Blaine, who once ran the Lud-Topeka line. The ka-tet revives Blaine, who announces his intention to wipe out Lud with nerve-gas – and the ka-tet with it, unless they can solve a riddle. They do, but as Blaine departs Lud (carrying through on his apocalyptic threat), he tells them that he intends to derail at high speed, killing himself and his passengers. Roland proposes a riddling contest for their lives, and Blaine accepts. The book ends.

If you are feeling really obsessive and want to track the exact changes Steve made in the 2003 Gunslinger, take a look at my book, Stephen King's The Dark Tower: The Complete Concordance (that's volumes I and II of the original Concordances combined). In The Complete Concordance, as in Volume I of the original two-volume Concordance, each character, place, or plot-twist that changes between the first version of The Gunslinger and the second version of The Gunslinger is marked with an asterisk. I think you'll be surprised by how many details change between the two books.

I must say that I like both versions of The Gunslinger. In fact, when I found out Steve was going to rewrite it, I was really surprised. I didn't think it needed to be rewritten at all. I liked the original plot; I liked the original writing style. In fact, I really liked the whole thing. However, once I saw the finished rewrite, I understood what he was doing. On a few occasions, Steve has even joked about rewriting the entire series! I don't know if he's really serious about doing that but could you imagine what a big project that would be?

SPOTLIGHT: So, Stephen King spends thirty years writing the Dark Tower series. He finally finishes, and you'd think he'd be ready to get on with his life. Suddenly – Marvel Comics! What's up with that?

ROBIN: What can I say? I guess Roland is a big part of Steve's life! The thing that's really different about the Marvel project is that the work-load is spread out among many people. It doesn't all fall on Steve's shoulders. The vision is Steve's, as is the mythology and general outline, but I've been responsible for the individual story arcs and the issue by issue plotting. Jae Lee has been doing the fantastic pencils, and Richard Isanove has done the wonderful coloring. The two of them make a magnificent team. After Jae and Richard are finished, the outlines and art work go to Peter David, who is doing the dialogue. (He's really caught the Mid-World dialect!) Behind the scenes, doing all of the editing, correcting, and generally making certain that everything reaches a really high standard, is Ralph Macchio and his great team. Also involved are all of the Marvel folks who deal with marketing, promotion, etc. It's an amazing group effort, and all done out of love for the Dark Tower books.

I must say, I've really enjoyed doing the story arcs, especially since I know Roland's history so well. Cuthbert Allgood and Alain Johns have always been two of my favorite characters (besides Roland of course), so to be able to spend time with them has been great. In order to fill in all the gaps between the end of Wizard and Glass and the Battle of Jericho Hill, I've had to go back through the books and trace Roland's journeys via his many storytelling sessions with

Jake, Eddie, and Susannah, his companions in the series. On some occasions I've just had to turn to Steve and say, Ahey, I'm pretty sure such-and-such happens, but am I right or wrong? The same goes for the articles I've been writing about Mid-World folklore.

SPOTLIGHT: How will the Dark Tower comic book connect to the books?

ROBIN: The first seven comics illustrate the events of Wizard and Glass, book 4 of the Dark Tower series. Since the book is so big (it's more than 600 pages) we had to really hone down the number of characters and focus on the main plot rather than subplots, but hopefully we caught the energy and drive of the original. I won't tell you where the seventh comic ends, but since you've read the book you can probably make a good guess'

The next five comics follow Roland, Alain, and Cuthbert back to Gilead. The following eighteen chart Roland's adventures from when he returns to Gilead through to the fall of that city, the battles between the gunslingers and Farson's forces, and the final defeat of the Affiliation, and the gunslingers, at the Battle of Jericho Hill.

Although the first seven are the only ones that are covered in great detail in Steve's Dark Tower books, the rest are based on events in Roland's life, ones that he recounts to his tet-mates during their trek along the Path of the Beam.

SPOTLIGHT: How is comic book writing going for you? Do you have any personal experience with comics, or is it all new to you?

ROBIN: I loved comics as a kid and young adult, and I must say that to this day Spider-Man has a special place in my heart. When I was about ten my grandmother (who was Czech) gave me a book of Russian Wonder Tales illustrated by the late 19th/early 20th century artist Ivan Bilibin, and he quickly became one of my heroes. Unfortunately, when I got to high school and college, I absorbed the notion, which at the time was extremely prevalent, that if I wanted to be a serious reader and a serious writer I had to put comics and illustrated books away. Why teachers and academics so frequently pretend that writing and drawing must remain separate I have no idea.

Anyway, when I was a freshman in college I studied the poetry of William Blake. I really liked Blake, but he didn't knock my socks off until a few years later when I discovered that Blake illustrated all of his work. Al. of a sudden his poetry, and his vision, clicked into place. I thought of Blake, of the caricaturist James Gillray, and of

BOOK 4:
WIZARD AND GLASS

The cliffhanger is quickly resolved as Eddie stumps Blaine, who drops them off in Topeka. Here, a super-flu has wiped out the population of a world very similar, but not identical, to ours. Roland tells a tale of his youth to his companions. While training to be a gunslinger, he learns that the Dark Man (in the guise of Walter) is having an affair with his mother. He is goaded into taking the test for his guns far too young, but unexpectedly survives. His father, who knows about Walter's treachery, sends him away to distant Mejis with two companions (who echo or foreshadow Eddie and Jake) to protect him from Walter's machinations. There, they unexpected discover a cell of revolutionaries who seek to help John Farson (another alias of the Dark Man?) overthrow In-World. Roland falls in love with a local girl named Susan Delgado. As tensions escalate, Roland learns in a vision of his destiny at the Dark Tower, and when given the choice between his pregnant lover and the Tower, he chooses the Tower. The final conflict between Roland's group and Farson's men is a decisive victory for Roland, but it only delays Farson's ultimate victory. Roland now knows that In-World must fall, and that he must depart on his quest for the Dark Tower. Back in the present, the ka-tet resumes its journey, coming to an Emerald Palace whose wizard turns out to be the Dark Man, Walter, or Randall Flagg, tries to dissuade Roland from his quest, but the ka-tet remains resolved. Roland chases Flagg away, then ends his story. Upon his return to Gilead, his mother had plotted to murder his father, and although he decided to give her a chance to repent, during an encounter in the dark his gunslinger reflexes outstripped his eyes, and he gunned her down. Back on the Beam, the ka-tet resumes their journey.

BOOK 5:
WOLVES OF THE CALLA

Two storylines intertwine, one in Mid-World and one in New York. In Mid-World, Susannah has developed a new personality, Mia, who is pregnant by the demon of the gate from The Waste Lands. Arriving at a farm town called Calla Bryn Sturgis, the ka-tet meets Father Callahan, a refugee from King's novel 'Salem's Lot, who on behalf of the town asks them to fight the Wolves of Thunderclap, which steal children from the town once each generation. The children are later returned in a mentally damaged state. The townsfolk are reluctant to accept help, and thus risk destruction at the hands of the Wolves, but ultimately they acquiesce. Roland trains them to fight the Wolves, and learns that the stolen children's brains are being used to fuel Breakers, psychic prisoners of the Man in Black who have the ability to damage the Beams. In a fierce battle, the ka-tet and the townspeople destroy the robotic Wolves. In the aftermath of the battle, Susannah goes into labor, Mia takes over her body, and they flee through a gate into our world.

Roland and his companions learn of a rose growing in New York City, which is somehow another representation of the Dark Tower. Should the rose be destroyed, the Tower — and reality — will fall. The rose is growing in a vacant lot, sought by an evil developer (Balazar, Eddie's former Mafia boss). Eddie sets up a rival corporation to acquire the vacant lot and protect the rose. Callahan tells of the vampire-hunting adventures that fell between 'Salem's Lot and his death and resurrection, how he met the Man in Black just before The Gunslinger, and how he followed Roland from there. And Roland learns of 'Salem's Lot and Stephen King.

BOOK 6:
SONG OF SUSANNAH

Susannah, possessed by the demon Mia, is in New York giving birth to a child that is magically Roland's. The Man in Black has promised to make Mia human and to allow her to raise the child. Jake, Oy, and Callahan follow her to New York. Roland and Eddie go to Maine to close the acquisition of the vacant lot. While there, they fight with the minions of Balazar, and realize they are near the home of Stephen King, future author of the Dark Tower books, which he has stopped writing. King's presence has weakened the barriers between worlds. Roland convinces King to continue the series. Meanwhile, Jake and Callahan learn that Susannah is being held at a vampire bar called the Dixie Pig, and they plan an assault to rescue her.

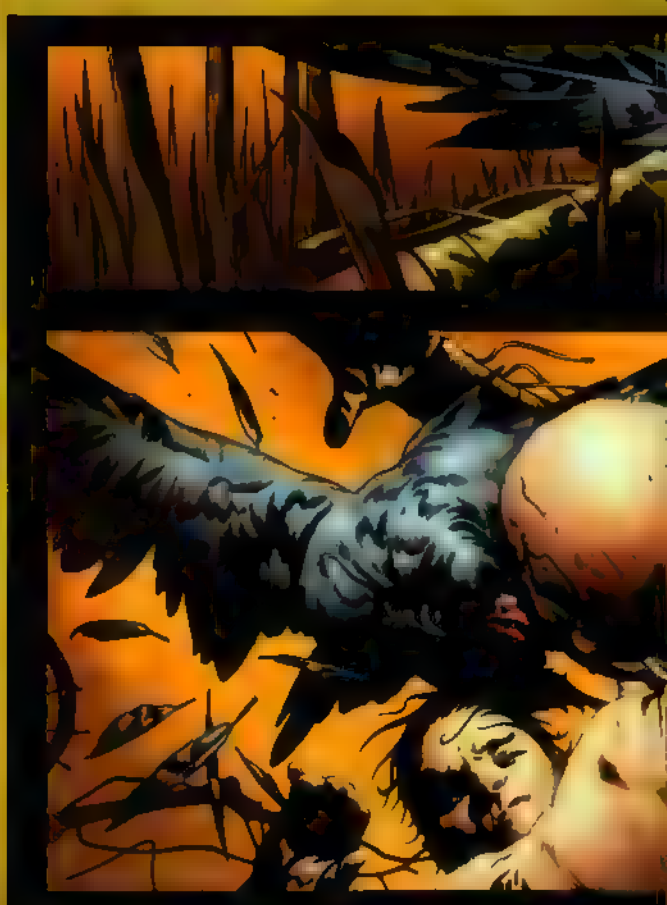
the illuminated manuscripts I loved and I realized that somebody had been fibbing to me. Art and words go naturally together

During the late 80s and early 90s I became really interested in animated films and started to look at issues of some underground comics like The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers and the Newcastle comic VIZ. (My brother-in-law was a huge VIZ fan, so I spent a lot of time reading about such tasteless but truly hilarious characters as Johnny Fartpants and Topless Skateboard Nun.) At about that time I became serious about novel-writing, and since I was writing about vampires and nasty girls in general, I started to collect comics about female vampires. (There are quite a few out there!) Dunno, I've always been quite a well-behaved woman, so perhaps I was looking for a naughty role model!

Though I liked comics, making the transition into writing for them was an extremely daunting prospect. The whole narrative structure is different from that of short stories or novels, since when I do a plot I am ultimately writing for the illustrator. It's like being the eye of the camera, constantly showing scenes, not focusing on dialogue or anything like that. Even emotions have to be somehow visual. I'm still learning as I go, but I have really enjoyed this whole process. It has been a blast!

SPOTLIGHT: I understand you're writing a novel of your own. How's that going, and what can you – or do you want to – tell us about it?

ROBIN: To tell you the truth, I'm incredibly superstitious about these things. I'm always afraid that if I talk about my characters too much before they are ready to meet the world in a finished form then they will desert me! What I will say though is that this is actually novel



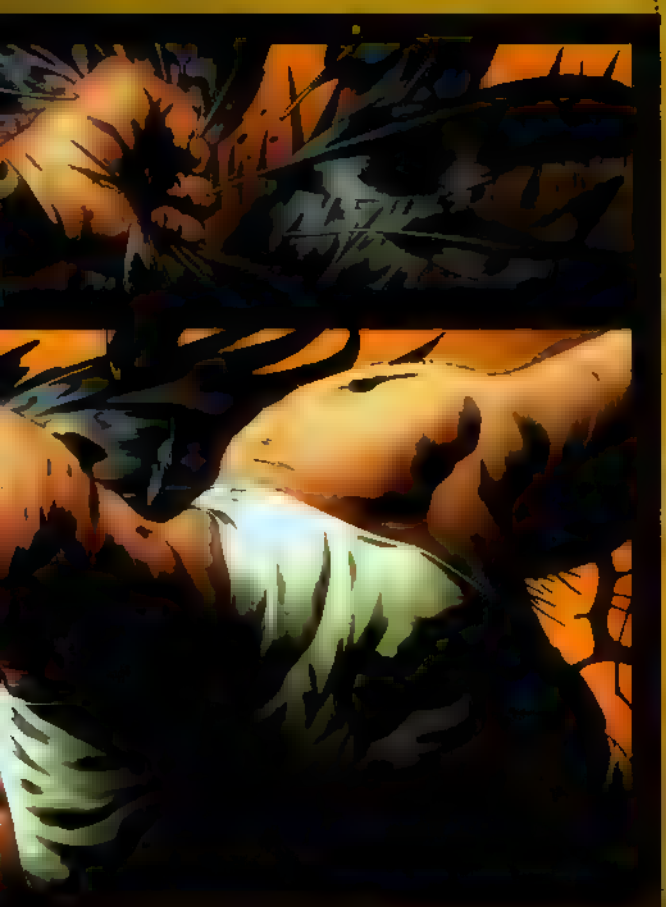
#2. I finished the first one before I started working for Steve King, but while working for Steve I learned a lot about plotting, about characters and about letting the imagination be itself. When I first started writing fiction, I depended on my rational mind too much. But the problem with the rational mind is that it can act as a filter – filtering out the good and the strange – every bit as much as it can be a generator of ideas. The rational mind has its place, but in my case it was getting in the way of my actual inspiration.

I love supernatural tales, and that's what I write. I love the weird, the bizarre, the uncanny, and sometimes the gruesome. Hence that's what I write about. I'm trying not to listen to all those voices in my head that tell me what subjects I should and shouldn't tackle, what will or will not be popular or controversial. And I'm definitely trying not to think about how horrified my parents are going to be when they see what I've done! It's hard to juggle the different writing projects, but I think I'm getting a little better at it. I guess modern life is always a balancing act.

SPOTLIGHT: Thank you for taking the time to talk with us, and good luck with the Dark Tower comic and your own work.

ROBIN: Thanks for listening! Take care and all the best!

Keep up with Robin's work on Stephen King's Dark Tower, published monthly by Marvel Comics!



BOOK 7: THE DARK TOWER

Callahan sacrifices himself for Jake at the Dixie Pig; Mia separates physically from Susannah and finally gives birth to Mordred, who eats Mia. Susannah and Jake escape. The Crimson King wants the Breakers (from Wolves of the Calla) to shatter the Beams; in the chaos that ensues, he intends to rule what's left of the multiverse. The Man in Black, however, has other plans. Roland and Eddie rescue the Breakers, but Eddie is mortally wounded. Roland and Jake return to Maine, where Stephen King's life is threatened by a speeding van; Jake pushes him out of the way and is killed. Roland and Susannah resume his ancient quest across the wastelands towards the Dark Tower. Susannah is granted the opportunity to abandon the quest and return to another New York, where an Eddie and a Jake much like her fallen friends await her. She goes. Roland and Oy reach the Dark Tower; in a Rosencrantz and Guildenstern moment, Mordred has killed the Man in Black, and now attacks Roland. Oy and Roland defeat him, but Oy dies in the process. Roland, alone again, defeats the Crimson King. When he reaches the top of the Tower, he discovers that he has been there many times before. He is sucked through a final doorway. Then Roland of Gilead pursues the Man in Black across a vast wasteland where worlds seem to blur together.

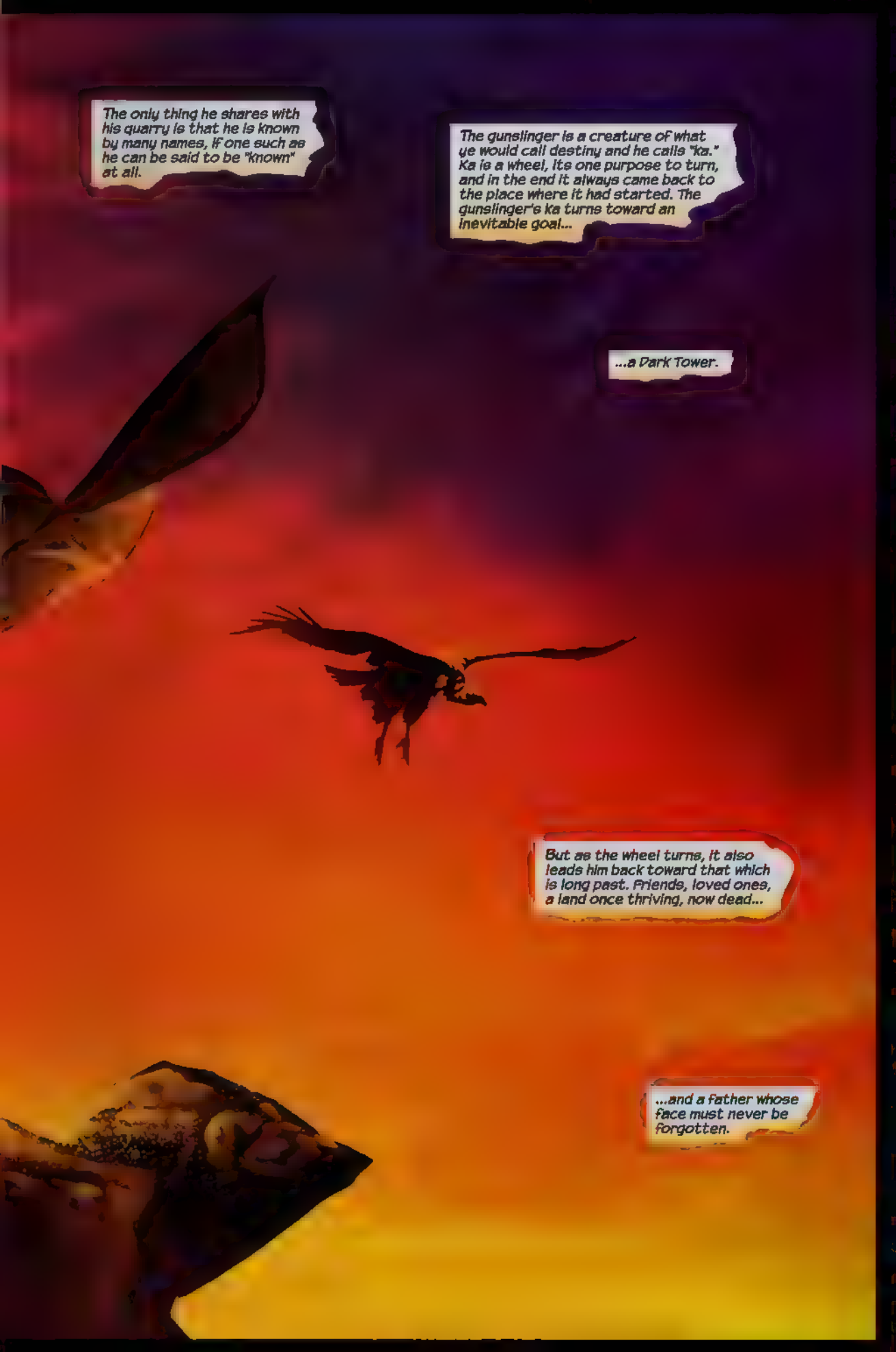
DARK TOWER REFERENCE

There are two excellent reference books about The Dark Tower. The Road to the Dark Tower is a fine analytical work, summarizing and analyzing each book, along with chapters on the major characters, Dark Tower material in other Stephen King works, and several major themes. Robin Furth's 2-volume Stephen King's The Dark Tower: A Concordance is a more encyclopedic work, with entries on all the characters and places found in the Dark Tower books, plus appendices with further information. A revised, one-volume edition has just been published.

See this now.
See it well.
A man, dressed all in ebony, sprinting across a white, blinding and waterless desert.
He makes deep noises in his throat, do ya not hear them?
Might be the ragged despair of a rabbit approaching its limits.
Might be the chuckling of a fox planning to turn the tables on its hunter.
Might be either or both, whatever pleases ya.
Can't say for sure. All I can say for sure is this:

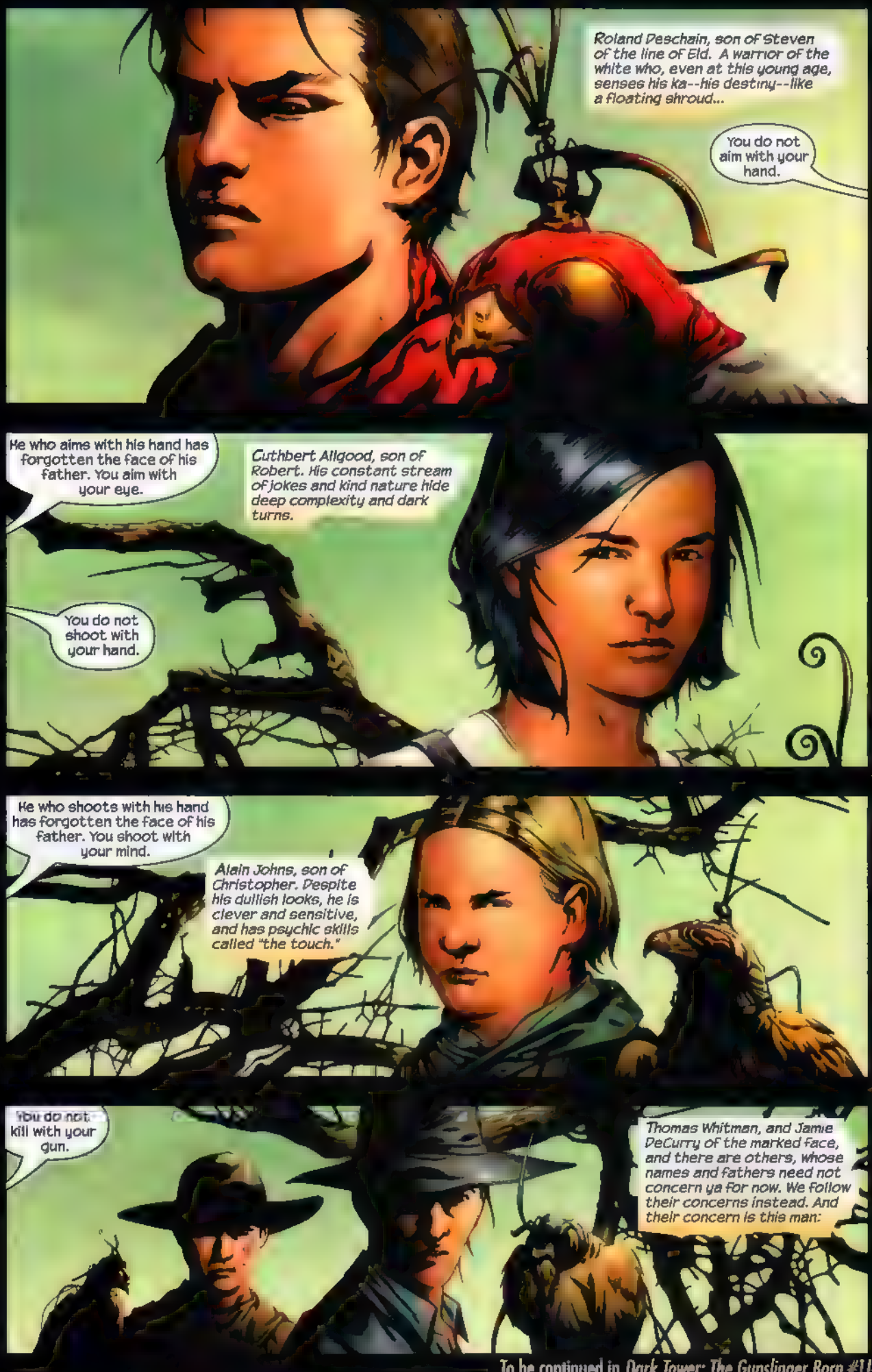
The Man in Black fled across the desert...
...and the gunslinger followed.
If the gunslinger looks familiar to you, well, that's as may be.
Echoes of him have been seen in tales spun across many other places, in many other ways.
Just as stories of a great flood, for instance, cut across the consciousness of all mankind, so too does the gunslinger.

He is iconic and legend and your best friend, praise the Man Jesus, and your worst enemy.
Your damnation or your salvation, and sometimes not even "or" but "and," do ya kennit?


The only thing he shares with his quarry is that he is known by many names, if one such as he can be said to be "known" at all.
The gunslinger is a creature of what ye would call destiny and he calls "ka." Ka is a wheel, its one purpose to turn, and in the end it always came back to the place where it had started. The gunslinger's ka turns toward an inevitable goal...
...a Dark Tower.
But as the wheel turns, it also leads him back toward that which is long past. Friends, loved ones, a land once thriving, now dead...
...and a father whose face must never be forgotten.

There is no more powerful summary of memories than smell.
See the gunslinger now, in his youth, with the shades of young men who have little concept of their mortality. See him...see these... very well.

Smell the heady aroma of the tall grass, and the clean air unbefouled by pollution, and say thankee, sai, for being given a view of the extinct realm of Gilead...
...at a time when the world was--if not new, although some called it "New Earth"--then at least not as old as it would become, and anything was possible.
When a man's quest would begin with a boy's test.


Roland Deschain, son of Steven of the line of Eld. A warrior of the white who, even at this young age, senses his ka--his destiny--like a floating shroud...
You do not aim with your hand.
He who aims with his hand has forgotten the face of his father. You aim with your eye.
Cuthbert Allgood, son of Robert. His constant stream of jokes and kind nature hide deep complexity and dark turns.
You do not shoot with your hand.
He who shoots with his hand has forgotten the face of his father. You shoot with your mind.
Alain Johns, son of Christopher. Despite his dullish looks, he is clever and sensitive, and has psychic skills called "the touch."
You do not kill with your gun.
Thomas Whitman, and Jamie DeCurry of the marked face, and there are others, whose names and fathers need not concern ya for now. We follow their concerns instead. And their concern is this man:

To be continued in *Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born #1!*

The Essential Handbook to
Stephen King's DARK TOWER Comic Series

MARVEL
YOUR UNIVERSE

APRIL 2007

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THE ARTISTS OF THE DARK TOWER:

JAE LEE AND RICHARD ISANOVE

Marvel Spotlight's coverage of Stephen King's ***Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*** continues, with illustrator Jae Lee and colorist Richard Isanove along to help us gain insight into the artistic values they are bringing to the fore on this very special project. Bringing the visual splendor of Mid-World to life would be a challenge for any artist, and we explore how it is that these two men were selected. Plus, Spotlight discusses the past successes and career challenges in their respective careers, with Jae's work on titles like ***Sentry***, ***Inhumans*** and ***Captain America***, and Richard's work on ***Marvel 1602***, ***Daredevil*** and ***Origin***.

THE SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW WITH JAE L

It's hard to imagine a more appropriate artist to bring the world of Dark Tower alive in the graphic storytelling medium than Jae Lee. As an artist, Jae provides a dramatic, gothic stylization along with believable figure drawing and atmospheric, credible settings. On Dark Tower, he gets a chance to show his storytelling chops as well — he is drawing not off of tight, panel-by-panel scripts, but off of plots filled with a multitude of characters and events he must juggle. This historic project has him both humbled and excited, and he is dedicated to doing the best work of his career. Aiding him in this endeavor is colorist supreme Richard Isanove, who will be coloring over Jae's pencils. Normally an artist who inks his own work, having the inking process eliminated will be a first for Jae, and the results look extraordinary. Jae has been working with Marvel since 1991, a long career that has seen him turn in classic work on Namor and Captain America, as well as a couple of breakthrough titles: Inhumans, and The Sentry. Spotlight writer Dugan Trodglen talked to Jae about what it means to work on a project with the magnitude of Dark Tower, how he's handling both the art and the responsibility, and about his earlier Marvel work.

SPOTLIGHT: You're a big Stephen King fan, we've heard. So tell us about how you got involved with the Dark Tower project and how it felt to be invited aboard?

JAE: For me that was just an incredible moment. I remember I had just gotten back from the video game store picking up a copy of Halo II. I was just about to break it open and I got a call from Joe Quesada — it was a Saturday — and he said, "How'd you like to work on a Stephen King project?" I was floored. I didn't believe it; I was really excited. I almost didn't want to tell my wife or anyone because I didn't want everyone to be disappointed, because at that point the deal wasn't even done; it was just a possibility. Then I put down Halo and I said, "Y'know, I don't think I should play this, I think I really need to focus on my work."

It was a few months after that when I got the call saying that it was almost done and the only thing they needed to do was show Mr. King some artwork. Joe gave me a copy of the Dark Tower books and said that Stephen King was coming to town for a meeting and wanted to see some pages. So we worked up some sample pages based on a loose plot that Joe had done. Richard Isanove and I only had a week or so to put those pages together. I was kind of frozen for a few days and it wasn't until about two days before Mr. King was coming in that I just had to make some decisions on the art and I just went with it.

SPOTLIGHT: Was everything approved at the time? Did Mr. King ask for any redesigns or anything?

JAE: Actually, he loved it. I wasn't sure how he would feel because these were characters he had lived with for most of his adult life. I think the comment that he gave Joe was that he purposely did not give a lot of description for these characters. He wanted the people reading them to interpret them in their own way and he was open to how I would visualize them. That was a big concern because there are so many characters and I didn't know if he had a set idea for how they would look. I think if anything that the fans are more particular about that kind of thing. I remember when the sketches were released there were a lot of comments like, "That's not how Cuthbert should look; that's not how Roland should look."

SPOTLIGHT: You had read Dark Tower before, right?

JAE: Oh, yes.

The artist, Jae Lee!

EE

SPOTLIGHT: When visualizing the Dark Tower characters, how much did you draw on how you pictured them as a reader, and how much was drawn from a fresh approach as an artist?

JAE: When I started with the samples, I had no idea what the book was going to be about. I didn't know if it was going to be an adaptation, or a continuation or what. At that point I hadn't read the last three books, so I didn't know exactly what to draw from. The samples were based on the first few pages of the Gunslinger. I just drew on what I knew about the character. He was a Clint Eastwood look-alike so I tried to make him look as much like Clint Eastwood as possible, but I'm so bad with likenesses...I'm just glad this wasn't going to be Roland in his adult years!

SPOTLIGHT: You're known for a gothic style and that certainly lends itself to this sort of tale. What aside from comic book art has gone into this atmospheric style and what has influenced it?

> "Joe Quesada made a comment that this doesn't look like my stuff, it doesn't look like Richard's stuff; it almost looks like a third artist worked on it."

JAE: I'd say most of my influences these days are movies or real life. It's been a while since I've looked at comics or other people's art for inspiration. When I started out in my career I was looking a lot at other artists, so my work started out very derivative and I made a conscious effort to move away from that and try to find different influences.

SPOTLIGHT: Interesting you should say you are influenced by movies and real life. Your work, although heavily stylized, has a unique kind of realism to it. When most people think of realism, they think of the photo-realistic or photo-referenced style, but your characters, within your stylization, have realistic postures, their clothes hang on them very believably.

Joe Lee collaborated on this FF mini-series with star writer Grant Morrison.

JAE: Thank you. To me there's no point in going for the ultra-realism. At that point it becomes too posed and stiff, and it starts to look like those Fumetti comics [comics constructed with a series of actual photos]. What's the point in that? I wanted to bring a sense of design and a little more personality than just tracing photos.

SPOTLIGHT: Dark Tower is a huge, high profile comic that is likely to resonate well beyond the comic book industry. How does it feel to be the person who will lead the visual aspects of this project?

JAE: Oh, it's a huge responsibility. I'm really, really excited by this project. For me, this is my, like, fifth chance in comics. I've had many chances and I think to some degree I've fallen short of other people's expectations and my own expectations. With this I see it not so much as "What are other people going to think of this?" and more a chance to me to really do something I can be incredibly proud of. I can be justified in taking a lot of time with the project and put a lot of care into it, knowing that a lot of people will be seeing it. It won't be a wasted effort.

The cover to *Inhumans* #1, the series featuring Marvel's mysterious hidden race that put Joe Lee's name on the map for good!

SPOTLIGHT: You have for years inked your own work. Is this your first time using the technique of having a colorist [Richard Isanove; see his interview following] go directly off of your pencils?

JAE: Yes it is. I was really nervous about that. First of all when I pencil, I tend to do it pretty loosely, and I do most of the drawing with the ink. With this project, I had to pencil it almost like it was ink. Using the pencil allows me to get different effects: different feathering techniques and shading for instance. It's like nothing I've done before, because I could never do these things when I relied on inking.

I was really nervous when I found out the process they wanted to use, because I had never had my stuff painted over and I'd never worked with Richard (aside from a cover we did years ago) and I just didn't know how this would turn out. The last time I didn't ink my own work was back in 1990, the first three months of my job. When Joe Q. approached me with this project and said he wanted to see some sample pages to present to Stephen King, he wanted two versions: one was going to be colored over pencils, and the other would be over ink, just to see which Mr. King would like more. I thought, "Wow, great, at least we'll have the option of doing it the way I feel comfortable." But when Richard did the first version, over my pencils, I was floored. I sent an email to everyone and said, "This is it. This is amazing. Forget about the ink."

I can't believe the incredible job Richard has been doing. I think it takes my art to a place it's never been before. There's only so much you can do with black and white art. I think this is truly the best collaboration I've ever been involved in. Joe made a comment that this doesn't look like my stuff, it doesn't look like Richard's stuff; it almost looks like a third artist worked on it.

SPOTLIGHT: What has been the most challenging part of what you're doing?

JAE: I would say the storytelling, and the amount of characters being thrown at the reader. If you're not familiar with the characters, it's up to me to help you follow them. Having been familiar with the book, there's a lot I take for granted. It's hard to look at this from the perspective of someone whose never read the books and wonder if it'll make sense or not. Thankfully we have editors like Ralph Macchio looking over the book to make sure it makes sense.

SPOTLIGHT: Are you drawing off of scripts?

JAE: No, I'm drawing off of Stephen King's plots. It's his story, with Robin Furth taking the plots, adding scenes and adapting into comic book format, breaking it down into paragraphs. I do the layouts and pencil it, and then it gets handed off to Peter David who then scripts it.

SPOTLIGHT: Is it a panel-by-panel plot, or is it a lot looser than that, with you handling more of the storytelling than pencillers generally do these days?

JAE: This is a loose plot, the way Marvel used to do things. I've been in this business long enough to have worked in that old "Marvel-style" of loose plotting, which nobody seems to do anymore. It provides the artist with a lot of freedom.

SPOTLIGHT: And a lot of responsibility.

JAE: Yeah, that's the other side of it. In a sense, if I wanted to tell the story in all splash pages, I guess I could.

SPOTLIGHT: Well, you might hear about it from the editors!

JAE: Yeah. But I think that's why, back in the 90s, all these artists were doing splashes and double-page spreads, and I don't think they should be blamed for that. If they only got two pages of plot, I don't think it's fair to blame the artist if the story isn't there.

That's not the case with Dark Tower. In fact the opposite is true. There's so much going on, and I have to condense everything. It's so hard not to make every page ten or twelve panels. That's one of the hard parts as well: cutting what you just can't fit in.

SPOTLIGHT: Are there plans beyond this mini-series and if so, are you involved?

JAE'S "A" GAME: INHUMANS

JAE: It's going to be a series of mini-series. It should be thirty issues, and I'll be on it as long as they'll have me!

SPOTLIGHT: Let's talk about the Inhumans a little bit. When it comes to your "chances" in comics, Inhumans was certainly a title you took full advantage of the chance you got.

JAE: That was one of my high points.

SPOTLIGHT: When the Marvel Knights imprint launched, Kevin Smith writing Daredevil got most of the press, but it wasn't long before people really started noticing your work with Paul Jenkins on that 12-issue series. How did you get involved with Marvel Knights and what was the reaction from your point of view?

JAE: At the time, I was working on Hellshock at Image, a creator-owned book I did. I was pretty much putting out one issue a year, and I was really struggling with the project, because I was writing it myself. I think I was a little too ambitious and I wasn't quite ready to do that, and I could have chosen a lighter subject matter. So I was really struggling and kind of looking for a way out. When Joe approached me with the new Marvel Knights company and how they were going to start a line using Marvel's B-list characters, it sounded interesting, but the character they approached me about was the Punisher and I wasn't crazy about the direction they wanted to take with the character, so I turned them down.

They came back and asked what I would be interested in. The colorist I was working with at the time – Jose Villarrubia, a really good friend of mine – started looking through the old Marvel Universe Handbooks, looking for characters that were sitting around doing nothing and he suggested the Inhumans. I thought, "That's brilliant! There we have it." We started looking for writers, and I had been looking to do a Hellshock/Hellblazer crossover with DC Comics. That never happened, but because of that, I became familiar with Paul Jenkins' scripting on Hellblazer. I thought he had such flair with dialogue, everyone sounds so natural. I thought he'd be a great choice for this, and he came on board.

I think with every issue that came out, the Editor-in-Chief at the time, Bob Harras, would go into the office of Nancy Quesada, my editor, and say, "This book's not doing well. We're going to cancel it after the next issue, so let's try and wrap it up."

SPOTLIGHT: That's awful.

JAE: So with every issue we were threatened with cancellation, even though it was supposed to be a planned 12-issue series. But sales started to go up with each issue, and we made it to the end.

A KING AND HIS DOG: Inhumans' Hugo Black Bolt and his precious pet, Lockjaw, from Jae's *Inhumans #8*.

SPOTLIGHT: You did several great character redesigns on Inhumans. Was that requested, or did you come up with those on your own?

JAE: I came up with the idea of reworking them. I thought if we were going to reintroduce them we might as well update them. I think Black Bolt was the only one I left somewhat untouched.

SPOTLIGHT: Well, he has one of the perfect costumes in comics.

JAE: Yeah, and I think everyone else needed a facelift. Looking back, some of them I'm happy with and some of them I wish I had done something different with.

SPOTLIGHT: What stands out as a favorite?

JAE: My favorite was Karnak.

SPOTLIGHT: This is an unusual point, but I noticed in the trade paperback that the first nine issues/chapters use black borders, and then it switches to the more traditional white for the last three. Was this an editorial decision to move away from black borders?

JAE'S CAP: Though from a confusing time in his career, this flashback to Cap's rescue is a highlight of the artist's Cap run. (*From Captain America #13.*)

JAE: No. After seeing the work printed, I saw how dark the art was, and with the colors so rich, I thought the panels kind of bled together and I wanted to separate it. Looking back, I should have kept it consistent, but that was back before trade paperbacks were so prevalent and we never thought about what it would look like in the collected format.

SPOTLIGHT: You worked some at Image, and that company was a big groundbreaker in terms of high-end production on comics, but the Marvel Knights line gave you the opportunity to work on a monthly comic using those high-end techniques.

JAE: That's what Marvel Knights was about. They hired the best colorists and let them do what they do best. I think before that Marvel didn't really care about the colorists and they didn't care about paper quality, but I remember many times Nancy would fight over how the art was scanned, and over the paper quality. I think Marvel Knights really made an impact on the quality control at Marvel.

SPOTLIGHT: How did this affect your approach?

JAE: It makes you want to do a better job. Having worked in the newsprint days with the flat coloring, a lot of the time when you wanted to do really detailed line work you'd ask yourself, "What's the point? It's going to print all muddy and no one's going to see this." And it was true – there was often a 50% dropout of the lines. So the Marvel Knights style makes you care more about the product because you know it's going to look good.

SPOTLIGHT: I'm a big dog lover, so one of my favorite issues of Inhumans was the Lockjaw-focused issue and you did a great job with his expressions. What did you use for reference on that?

JAE: I went to the library and picked up a book on how to take care of a bulldog, but unfortunately there weren't a lot of action shots or expressions, so every time you see him walking or running or doing something I kind of had to make that up. That was back in the days before Google Images! It would have been nice to have known someone with a bulldog but I was living in Virginia and there were no bulldogs. Now I live in New York and I see them all the time!

SPOTLIGHT: You had the opportunity to work on one of Marvel's icons during a run on Captain America [Vol. 4 #10-16]. That was a very turbulent time on the title, with both the writer and artist changing mid-storyline. How did you stumble into this situation?

JAE: (Laughter.) Stumble is a good way to put it! That was probably one of the lowest points in my career. At that point I was not focused on what I was doing and I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was at the point I didn't even care what I was drawing. That project was just a nightmare. Halfway through another writer came in to finish it. It was so bad – there was a scene early on where, in the original plot, the villain was standing on a

mountain rooftop in Europe with a night sky, and when the new writer came in he rewrote the caption and it said, "Meanwhile, in the underwater kingdom of Lemuria..."

SPOTLIGHT: I don't think it stopped you from producing quality work. There was an unforgettable flashback splash page with Giant Man grabbing Cap in the frozen waters of the North Atlantic (expanding on a panel from Avengers #4).

JAE: That was actually a fun scene to draw. But overall, it was a nightmare. The "Ice" storyline was originally supposed to be a miniseries with John Rieber addressing Captain America's origin, but John had some creative differences with the editorial staff and he left and the project fell apart. The original plot and script were actually pretty good, but what actually happened was terrible. That single-handedly made me change the way I looked at my art. I looked at that and said, "I really have to step it up."

JAE LEE MEETS THE SENTRY!

SPOTLIGHT: After Inhumans you worked on another Marvel Knights project with Paul Jenkins: The Sentry mini-series. It was interesting project, both because it was an original character and because the marketing became almost as well known as the series. How did you and Paul come up with the character?

JAE: Paul had the idea for the character years ago. It was a pet project he always wanted to do. I think it was pretty rare at Marvel to introduce a new character. As we were wrapping up Inhumans, we were wondering what we'd do next, and he brought up the Sentry character. When I came on board I did all the designs.

SPOTLIGHT: Was it fun building a character to add to Marvel's stable, one that eventually became part of the fabric of the Marvel Universe?

JAE: Yeah, I got such a kick out of seeing him in the Avengers. I never thought he'd come back. It's funny — I think to this day some people still think John Romita Sr. designed him, but in fact we sent him my designs and he drew supposedly old drawings from back in the sixties.

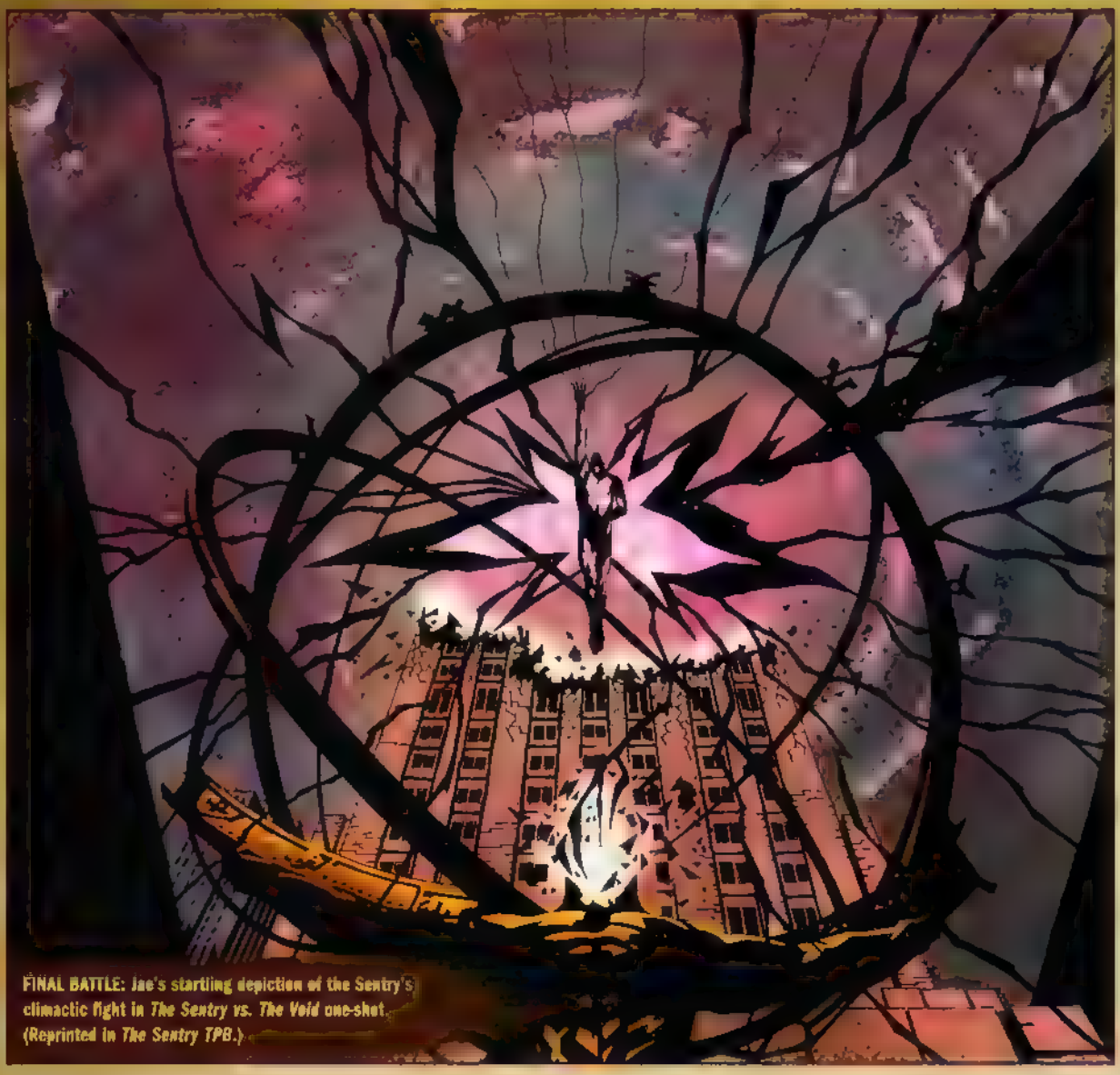
SPOTLIGHT: It must have been cool to design a character and have John Romita draw him.

JAE: That was really cool. But people still think that came first, but that was a joke.

SPOTLIGHT: And people seemed to get angry when they found out the Sentry was not in fact on old character. Considering the artist was supposedly Artie Rosen, a name that was an amalgam of classic Marvel letterers Artie Simeck and Sam Rosen, it seems obvious they weren't setting out to fool anyone. It was just a fun way to promote the series.

JAE: Right.

The Sentry, written by Paul Jenkins, told of the struggles between Richard Reynolds, the mysterious entity The Void, and the latent memories of his super-hero persona. (Images from Sentry #1.)



FINAL BATTLE: Jae's startling depiction of the Sentry's climactic fight in *The Sentry vs. The Void* one-shot. (Reprinted in *The Sentry TPB*.)

SPOTLIGHT: On Sentry and several later projects [Fantastic Four: 1234, The Sentry, Captain America] you worked with your friend, colorist Jose Villarrubia and the results were out of sight. Like Richard Isanove (but in a very different way), Jose uses a very experimental technique. What does working with Jose bring out of you?

JAE: Back at that time there wasn't a lot of variety in coloring. Everyone seemed to color everything like it was made out of shiny plastic and I really didn't like that look. I wanted something more "painterly," more organic. Because we're good friends, we have a great working relationship; I can tell him what looks bad and what looks good.

SPOTLIGHT: Let's get some background. You were born in South Korea, right? How did you get to the U.S.?

JAE: When my dad first came to America, there was someone in South Korea telling people he could get people jobs and a passport and line everything up if you paid him. My dad fell victim to the scam, and he was in the U.S. and had very few options. This was at the tail end of the Viet Nam War, and he enlisted in the U.S. Army. Back then, if you served four years you automatically became a citizen. I didn't see my dad until I came to America when I was five, when he was able to bring us over after his military stint. We lived in Texas for two years and then moved to Virginia. I now live in New York.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you receive any art schooling?

JAE: I went to the Art Institute of Atlanta for three months and then I quit. It was right across from Lenox Mall and I remember going there every day after school and going to Tower Records, looking at the Laser Discs and thinking, "Laser Discs are awesome! I can't wait to get one of these!" (Laughter.)

SPOTLIGHT: How did you become attracted to the Art Institute of Atlanta from Virginia?

JAE: My parents had always wanted me to get a college degree, and I was such an egotistical kid that I thought I knew everything there was to know about art; I didn't need to learn any more. So as a compromise I decided I'd get

a two year associates degree. AIA had a representative come to our school and talk to the art students, and without really caring, I said, "I'll just go there."

SPOTLIGHT: So those three months represent your only schooling?

JAE: Yes. The rest was just the school of hard knocks.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you break into comics?

JAE: Right after I finished high school I went to New York for a comic book convention and brought my portfolio thinking, "This stuff is awesome; I'm such an awesome artist. I don't even need to go to college. I'll show my parents – right after high school I'm gonna go to New York and get a job!" I worked up some sample pages of the Silver Surfer flying through space thinking they were gonna jump all over me. I went to the convention, and the first editor I went to just ripped my work apart. I was almost on the verge of tears. There was a writer looking over my shoulder. It was Scott Lobdell, who was just trying to break in himself. He saw some potential in my work and he felt bad about how the editor had treated me. He gave me his address and told me to work up some more samples and send them to him and he'd show them around at Marvel.

So I left New York with a little bit of hope, but then I went ahead and went to college. After three months I couldn't handle the school anymore. Instead of going to class I would just sit in my apartment and work up sample pages. I moved back in with my parents. I'd be waking up at three in the afternoon, and my mom would come into my room and I'd be sitting there reading comics and she'd shake her head, "What are you doing with your life?" Eventually I sent some more sample pages to Scott Lobdell and a week later I got my first job, which was Marvel Comics Presents #85, with the Beast.

SPOTLIGHT: Well we sure appreciate your time, Jae. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about working on Dark Tower?

JAE: I normally hate everything I do and there are very few books I feel proud of. In fact I don't think there's a single book I can look back on and say that I really like the way it turned out. There are a few illustrations that I think still hold up, but an entire book? Never. And with this, I think I've really finally reached a point where I'm truly proud of the work I've done and I'm truly blessed to be working with Richard on this. I think together we're just going to do great things.

SPOTLIGHT: Thanks, Jae. You can get back to drawing, or playing Halo now.

JAE: Oh, I don't play Halo anymore.

Wow! Now that's discipline! Thanks to Jae Lee and here's hoping DARK TOWER helps skyrocket him to new heights in his career – he certainly deserves it!

A NEW AVENGER: Well before he would join their ranks, the Sentry meets the Avengers for the first time (or is it the first time?) *From Sentry #4.*

BRINGING COLOR TO THE DARK TOWER

Richard Isanove has achieved rarified status as a colorist with renown as a true comic art superstar. His astonishing technique first received popular notice in the high-profile series Origin, where he digitally painted the story of Wolverine's origin directly over Andy Kubert's pencils. Later he and Kubert collaborated again on another big event title, Marvel 1602, where he helped bring to life celebrated writer Neil Gaiman's first work with Marvel. He is now employing a similar technique over Jae Lee's pencils on Dark Tower. The relationship between penciller and colorist on Origin, 1602 and Dark Tower is as close a collaboration as comic book art has seen, with Isanove recognized as an equal contributor to the look of each series. Spotlight couldn't take an in-depth look at Dark Tower without talking to Richard!

SPOTLIGHT: By way of your artistic productivity over the last several years, you have helped bring the role of the colorist closer to the collaborative forefront. Do you think the way you work with the artist will become the norm in the future, particularly your technique of coloring directly over pencils?

RICHARD: Coloring over pencils is really just another way of doing the same old thing; it's more of a horizontal expansion than an evolution. It depends on what look you're trying to obtain and on the style of the penciller. Mike Mignola likes his work colored with flats, Gary Frank loves the crispness of the inked line over his pencils. They all are, obviously, legitimate options. The digital painting process can be overpowering and the penciller has to be willing to take the risk of seeing his drawing wrecked by the colorist's mistakes. It's also very time consuming and would be very hard (for me, anyway) to do on a monthly basis.

SPOTLIGHT: Tell us a little about your background. Where did you receive your training?

RICHARD: I got an MFA in France in Fine Arts and Film and I went to Cal Arts to study animation. Then I was hired by Brian Haberlin at Top Cow, back when digital coloring was in its infancy. Most of my training as a colorist came from working in the studio with Dean White, J.D. Smith, Steve Firchow, and Tyson Wrengler, who are still in my eyes the uncontested masters of the medium.

SPOTLIGHT: How would you describe the impact of digital

THE COLORIST AT WORK: Richard Isanove, pictured at his art table, adds depth and texture to all the artwork he touches, like this Andy Kubert drawing of the Phoenix, in Neil Gaiman's *Marvel 1602*. (From *Marvel 1602* #7.)

technology on the process of coloring and on comic book art in general?

RICHARD: First of all, it gave me a job, so I'm pretty happy about that. I think it allowed the medium to show more things in a more efficient way, expand its vocabulary. It also makes for pretty good eye candy.

It probably also slightly changed the way pencillers draw: they can rely more on the colorist to indicate depth, volume, light, etc...Adam Kubert told me he was taught to make his pencils color-proof, but once you enter a partnership with a colorist you trust, you can stop worrying and start letting loose.

SPOTLIGHT: Your first major work for Marvel was as part of the early run on the Marvel Knights Daredevil, and your experimental work with Joe Quesada and Jimmy Palmiotti on the "Parts of a Hole" story (Daredevil #9-15) really stands out. What kinds of challenges did Joe's approach to the art present to you and how did you tackle them?

RICHARD: My very first job at Marvel was X-Men #82. In the story, there was a back and forth between two dimensions and Adam drew the alternate reality in pencils. I decided to approach those pages the way of Hermann did in the series "Jeremiah" (on which the TV show was based) and imitated a watercolor rendering. Joe saw those pages and asked me to join the team for the second half of the "Guardian Angel" story arc.

Richard Isanove's stunning color work to Joe Quesada's art in *Daredevil #10*.

> "I always equate my work to being the bass player in a band: it's essential and a mistake can ruin everything but a good job usually goes unnoticed."

On the "Parts of a Hole" story, Joe's drawings and layouts were so influenced by David Mack, who was writing the series, and I thought I should go in the same direction. I scanned some rice paper textures, painted dozens of pages with all kinds of splatters and textures and mixed it all in. Joe's pages had panels left in pencils, with kid's drawings, with designs and backgrounds on separate sheets. He had a very specific idea of where he wanted everything to go but for my part, he just told me "make it look really cool."

The dance scene at the end of the second issue (Daredevil #10) is my favorite sequence: the drawings were so beautiful and all the elements came together better than I could imagine. On the first issue I thought of connecting the background of each page with the previous and next one. It's really all one big spread from beginning to end, punctuated by a few of pages with a black background. Doesn't really show, but it's kinda cool.

Overall, I'd say I've been very lucky to work with pencillers that always want to try something new with their work.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you develop your painted style?

RICHARD: When Marvel decided to start the Ultimate line, Joe did a promotional drawing of Spider-Man climbing a wall, and he left it in pencils. He then took a

Richard's painting of "The Feast," a variant cover designed for the Wolverine tale *Origin*.

photo leaning outside his window and asked me to put it together. The resolution was pretty low so I thought the only way to make it look good would be to actually paint over the background so that it would match the character. I spent three or four days covering up every detail of the photo with brush strokes of the same color. The response was really positive and encouraged me to keep experimenting in that direction.

SPOTLIGHT: When you joined the artistic team on Origin, everyone really seemed to take notice at the prominence of your contribution. Whose idea was it to approach the art this way?

RICHARD: After we finished the Spidey piece, Joe and I were talking about doing a whole book using that same technique. He realized it would be too time consuming, but he said there was a project coming up that might be cool to do that way. That was Origin. Looking back, it was a pretty gutsy move on Marvel's part on such a hyped project. The covers were approached as if they were acrylic or oil paintings, but for the inside we decided that Andy's pencils should show through the colors so I adopted a technique closer to watercolor and gouache. As we went along, we found a balance where we all felt very free and creative.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you feel about the reaction to Origin?

RICHARD: It was amazing. It was a pretty crazy time because my son was born just when the first issue came out, and I was also coloring Hulk/ Wolverine with Sam Kieth. I spent six months barely conscious due to lack of sleep. I always equate my work to being the bass player in a band: it's essential and a mistake can ruin everything but a good job usually goes unnoticed. And then, overnight, I was treated like Jaco Pastorius or_____ (put your favorite bass player's name here) [Interviewer's note: Ron Carter!]. I didn't start drinking like Jaco and the enthusiasm leveled down but it's definitely nice to have such an overwhelming positive response to your work, even if it's really mostly due to the high profile of the project. Overall, it remains a great reference point and it did change everything for me within the industry.

SPOTLIGHT: You later had a similar collaboration with Kubert on the big Neil Gaiman Marvel project Marvel 1602. Now you're working on another project with a huge profile. How does it feel to be a part of a Stephen King book?

RICHARD: I kinda thought Origin would be an anomaly in my career. There were talks about a sequel, but I didn't anticipate that there would be another vehicle for this type of work. Then they gave me 1602. After that, I went back to coloring while still digitally painting covers and waited to see what, if anything, would come up. No matter what, I couldn't really see what could top Origin or working with Neil Gaiman.

I had discovered Stephen King kind of late, with Bag of Bones (I listened to the audio book while working on X-Men #82), and quickly became an unconditional fan. I've since read about 25 of his novels. So, when Joe Q called me and told me about the Dark Tower project, I tried to play it cool, but it felt like when I got a Grendinzer action figure for Christmas when I was ten.

It's also very cool to be able to name-drop Stephen King in a conversation!

SPOTLIGHT: How has the collaborative process gone with Jae Lee? Had you worked together before?

RICHARD: I discovered Jae's work on Namor in the early '90s and have followed his career ever since. I colored a cover of his back in 1999 for Chaos comics and met him a couple of times, but we didn't really know each other. Now, we spend hours on the phone talking about TV shows, comics and gossiping like two old ladies.

Probably because I was so familiar with his art, I was able to just jump on the page and it came very naturally. I instinctively knew how to approach the work. It took some fine tuning of course but, by now, I think we've found a way to complement each other which is hard to express.

SPOTLIGHT: There was apparently some talk that you may have done more traditional coloring on Dark Tower. What's the story there?

RICHARD: Stephen King was coming to the Marvel offices to see some samples of what they would do if the project were to go ahead. They weren't sure what he was expecting so they thought the safest way to get him on board would be to present him with a couple of options. Jae usually inks his own work and I suspect he wasn't really comfortable handing out his pencils to someone else and wanted to try different approaches.

For my part, I was a little worried because painting is so much more enjoyable than just coloring and I was really rooting for option A. Also time was really starting to become an issue since the three pages had now turned into five, and that I only had a few days to complete them. Doing two versions was going to be tight. Luckily for me, when Jae saw the painted pages, he believed that was the way to go and the people at Marvel agreed.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you take any cues from the Dark Tower books as to how things might be colored, or, less specifically, what atmosphere you were going for?

RICHARD: When we started I had read the beginning of "The Gunslinger" but never got any further into the series. I bought all the audio books and started listening to them while working on Dark Tower pages. It's a great feeling to experience this adventure, to soak in that universe, while adding your little contribution to it.

The books mostly helped me understand the characters and set a general mood. I usually don't start coloring with a pre-conceived idea of where I'm going and having a fresh complete knowledge of the Dark Tower Universe makes it easy to know what does or doesn't feel right.

SPOTLIGHT: What aspect of Dark Tower has been the most exciting to help bring to life?

RICHARD: We're doing a lot of scenes that are in the books and it's really cool to actually be able to flesh out those mental images. That said, my favorite pages are the scenes between Roland and Susan Delgado. Jae's work on these sequences is nothing short of incredible. It's so beautiful, I suggested that we get rid of the rest of the story and turn it into a romance graphic novel: just those two kids meeting in different, secret places, at the break of dawn or at sunset, talking for seven issues. Ralph Macchio wouldn't go for it, though.

Ah, well. Maybe Ralph's call is for the best. Thanks a lot for your time, Richard. It sounds like you have a lot of work in front of you!

A lovely but tragic page from *Origin* #3.

THE SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW WITH PETER DAVID

One of Marvel's most popular and longstanding writers is

Peter

For more than twenty years, Peter Allen David has been entertaining science fiction and fantasy fans with his writing. As varied and diverse as that writing is, it retains one constant: it never fails to surprise readers, even those who are longtime fans. Thus, PAD (his shorthand nickname adopted by fandom) fans were both shocked and yet simultaneously accustomed to the feeling when the announcement was made that Peter David would be writing the graphic fiction continuation of Stephen King's ***Dark Tower*** saga. ***Spotlight*** got the chance to speak with this wizard of words, where we discussed not only the upcoming ***Dark Tower*** series, but PAD's other goings-on at Marvel, where he recently signed a deal to write exclusively for the company.

Though the ***Dark Tower*** Saga itself is an epic tale, the saga of PAD's involvement in the series began in a somewhat more subdued manner. Says PAD, "I would love to have some elaborate, sexy tale to tell over how I sought/threatened/seduced the right people in order to obtain the gig. But it's really no more involved than that: Joe Quesada called me up, asked me if I'd be interested, and I jumped at the opportunity."

Almost anyone would jump at such an opportunity, but in particular, PAD had an encounter with the author to whose work he would one day be asked to contribute, an encounter which adds an extra texture of meaning to their collaboration. "Years and years ago, I attended a book signing that he (Stephen King) was doing. I showed up with my copy of Danse Macabre and told him I was an aspiring writer. He wrote 'Good luck with your writing career' on it. Nowadays whenever any fan come up to me and tell me they're aspiring writers and want me to sign a book, I write 'Good luck with your writing career' on it, tell them that Stephen King once wrote that to me, and their obligation was now to become successful enough to be sitting on the other side of the table inscribe the same thing to aspiring writers who came up to them."

Despite currently enjoying a level of success that must have seemed remote at the time King autographed his book for him, PAD doesn't take continuing this saga lightly. He's done his homework on the ***Dark Tower*** mythos, and links off a hefty reading list. "All of the novels, plus related novels such as ***Insomnia***, plus Robin Furth's excellent concordance, plus now I'm reading Ben Vincent's comprehensive ***Road to the Dark Tower*** to get further insight."

Work aside, though, for a fan, PAD has enjoyed reading the series, and describes it as "probably the most ambitious fantasy epic of the last twenty years." As a writer, he is equally impressed at the craft of the series, even where one might expect some inevitable criticism. "It's particularly fascinating to watch King deconstruct his entire universe in the last couple of books. At its best, it's brilliant. At its worst, it's so brazenly self-indulgent that you just have to shake your head in admiration at the sheer nerve it took to produce it."

PAD has some favorites among King's other novels, as well. He had a ***Green Dragon. The Stand*** knocked [illegible] a lot of people, including myself, read it when we had colds, because you're laying there sick in bed, you've got nothing to do, well, where are you going to do? Here's this big honking Stephen King novel you're going to crack open, because it's the size of a doorstop. So you start reading ***The Stand***, and what's the first thing that happens? A plague wipes out the majority of humanity, a plague that first presents itself as symptoms of a common cold. So you're sitting there with a head cold and reading about someone whose nose is stuffed and then suddenly it falls off. And you're going 'Holy shit!' So he's always known that he knows you where you live."

PAD has been in the collaborative process of developing the ***Dark Tower*** adaptation. He's surrounded King cohort Robin Furth and two of the top talents in Marvel's art stable, artist Joe Lee (***Sentry/Inhumans***) and colorist Richard Isanove (***Origin/Marvel 1602***). Describing the process of continuing the ***Dark Tower*** saga in graphic form, PAD explains, "I receive the pages from Joe and the basic outline that Robin provides. Some of the scenes are taken directly from the book, and I script these with a combination of the individual narrative style I've developed for the comic, and actual dialogue from the King books (I take liberties with prose, but always defer to the original dialogue). Interweave these with wholly original scenes and sequences, which is the real challenge because I have to make them seamless with the segments that are right out of King's material."

A VISION OF THE FUTURE. Spider-Man gets treated to a nightmarish vision of the future in Peter David's *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man #9*.

"[Dark Tower] is a deal that was covered in *Entertainment Weekly*. You bet it's big, and - I apologize for the cliché - I'm just honored to be a part of it."

X-FACTOR: MULTIPLES OF X

X-FACTOR VISIONARIES: Peter David's first run of X-Factor comics are reprinted in *X-Factor Visionaries: Peter David Vol. 1-2 TPB*.

"uncanny" dialogue, all topped off with fast-paced, entertaining stories of a mutant perspective. It became a fan favorite, and even though PAD's run ended in a bit under two years due to his frustrations with editorial, it has long been remembered as a highlight of that era's X-Universe, allowing many of its previously obscure characters to become cult favorites as a result.

Fast-forward back to 2004. PAD and editor Andy Schmidt were brainstorming on their next collaborative project, and Schmidt – remembering how well-received PAD's original ***X-Factor*** run was with fans – proposed returning to one of the best-loved characters from that run, with a six-issue mini-series featuring Jamie Madrox, the Multiple Man. Both agreed that a different take on the character was warranted for this new era, though, and that take was inspired by the genre of film noir. Says PAD, "It simply seemed appropriate for what we were doing here: A down and dirty detective agency."

And Jamie was a big draw for PAD. "I love the idea of a character who can see all sides of a situation, all directions, and almost becomes paralyzed because he doesn't know what direction to go. It almost makes him the Marvel Age equivalent of Hamlet. He's always standing there saying 'Should I do this? Should I do that?' The thing is, of course, in Hamlet's case, he has to choose one direction to go. Jamie knows he can go in all different directions, and thus he has even more difficulty deciding."

X-FACTOR 2006: The new team, assembled by Peter David in the wake of *House of M*: Jamie Madrox, the Multiple Man (center), and clockwise starting in the lower left, Rahne Sinclair, Strong Guy, Rictor, Siryn and Monet. (From the cover to *X-Factor: The Longest Night* TPB/HC, art by Ryan Sook.)

The ***Madrox*** miniseries became a surprise hit with both critics and the sales charts, and led to a brand new, ongoing ***X-Factor*** series, a series drawn in the same vein as the ***Madrox*** mini, with one subtle difference that means everything to the dramatic tension of the team book: Madrox and his many attendant multiples are now team leaders. As PAD says, the stakes for Jamie and the intransigence of his many heads approach to decision-making have just gotten a little higher. "When it was just him, he could get away with that, but now he has people depending on him. He's the leader of a team. So he has to suck it up and grow up."

As for the tone of the book itself, PAD is quite clear about his goals. "Traditionally, when I've written any incarnation of ***X-Factor***, there's been something about the mood, tone and style that makes it different from any other X-book. In my original run, it was humor. This time around, it's the darker, noir feel."

One might look at the obvious, successful launches of ***Madrox*** and ***X-Factor*** as signals of a new phase in his career, but PAD offers his typically wry take on that suggestion. "I suppose, although it's ironic, I guess – I'm not sure how it's become a 'new phase' considering one of the big selling points of it was that it was to appeal to fans of my work on ***X-Factor*** from the previous century!" PAD credits his editor, Andy Schmidt, with the very existence of this series. "There would be no book if it weren't for him. Somehow he managed to get the ***Madrox*** series into existence through sheer willpower. I still wonder who he had blackmail pictures on to convince Marvel that publishing a five-issue series about a character like Jamie Madrox was somehow a good idea. If it weren't for the mini, ***X-Factor*** simply wouldn't exist."

PUTTING THE "X" IN X-FACTOR

The new series features some familiar mutant faces: returning are team leader Jamie Madrox, and old members Strong Guy and Wolfsbane (familiarly known by their real names to longtime fans as Guido Carosella and Rahne Sinclair, respectively). Another character that played a pivotal role in the original run has made appearances in the new series as well: the mutant speedster, Quicksilver.

The rest of the cast was drawn from varied corners of the X-verse, including such longtime titles as ***Generation X*** and ***X-Force***. This includes Monet, the gorgeous and haughty mutant who carries herself like a princess and has no patience for those who do not meet her standards; Rictor, one of Wolfsbane's fellow ***New Mutant*** alumni; and Shatterstar, the daughter of Banshee with a similarly ear-shattering voice.

The selection process was to some degree a matter of convenience, PAD relates. "Basically, Andy obtained a list of characters who were available for use. We knew we were sticking with Jamie, Guido and Rahne. Then it was a matter of seeing who we could use, and which personalities would provide the best stories when contrasted."

Their arrival would continue the reshaping of the Marvel Universe that began with ***Avengers Disassembled***. In the denouement of Brian Bendis' ***House of M*** mini-series, the mutant Scarlet Witch used her reality-altering powers to strip 90% of the world's mutants of their powers. A new character was introduced in that series, a little girl named Layla Miller who seemed to know far more about the circumstances of the Scarlet Witch's reality tampering than anyone ought to have known, such for a little girl. She has since become a key player in ***X-Factor***.

...and despite the fact that she had more appearances in his new team book than any other, PAD emphatically clarifies who created her: "No, I absolutely did not create Layla. She was Brian's creation. I suggested that I incorporate her into ***X-Factor*** because our series was flowing directly out of ***House of M***, and she was a major player in it. So she seemed like a valuable connecting link. And it's a value that PAD has refined over time with explicit input from her creator, Bendis. "I spoke extensively with Brian about how I'd like to use her, and he was consistently enthusiastic and supportive. He seemed really pleased that she was going to be relevant to the Marvel Universe beyond the end of HOM."

As ***X-Factor*** launched in the wake of ***House of M***, during the so-called Decimation event, the fallout from HOM has comprised the main subplot throughout the series to date. Madrox and his companions at the ***X-Factor*** Investigations detective agency have set up shop in what is known as "Mutant Town," an area of New York City previously heavily populated by powered mutants, and an area currently wracked by the sudden disappearance of those powers. Many of these de-powered mutants are frightened and angry, giving Jamie's team further dimension in their cause to help bind the mutant community together, and ***X-Factor*** must also contend with mutant-hating humans seeking to take advantage of the situation. In the midst of all this, as befitting a detective agency, ***X-Factor*** is out to solve a mystery: how did the Decimation happen, and how can it be reversed?

Artist Roy Allan Martinez illustrates the strained psyche of Strong Guy (thanks to bad guy Damian Tryp) from PAD's *X-Factor* #11.

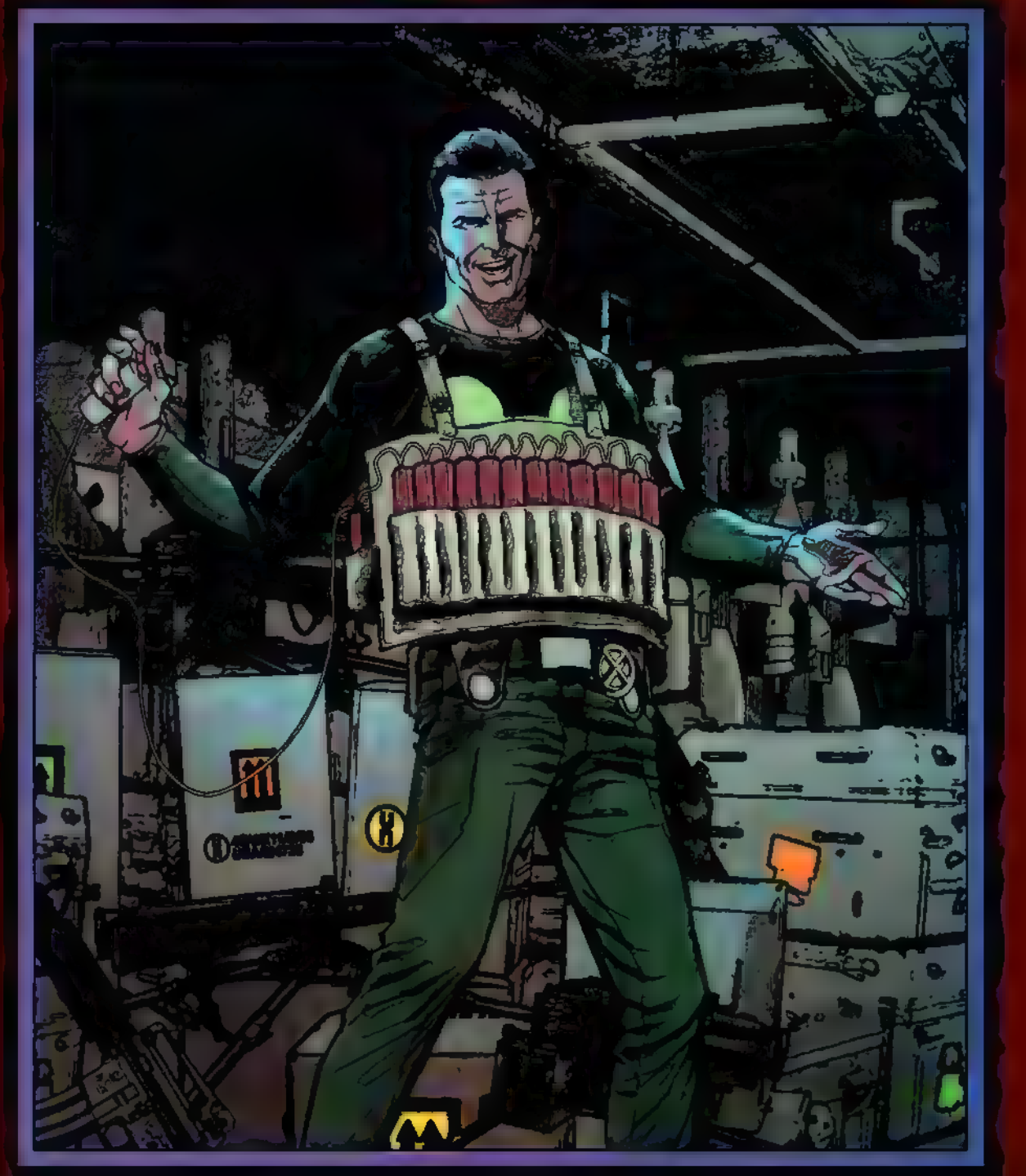
LAYLA MILLER: The sometimes creepy and always inscrutable smarty-pants from *House of M* is one of PAD's best-written characters in *X-Factor*. (From *X-Factor* #3.)

And things look to be getting more and more intriguing for the cast of *X-Factor*. Recently, we've seen a reprise of the classic "therapy" issue (from *X-Factor Vol. 1 #87*), as the cast is psychoanalyzed by the Marvel Universe's resident psychiatrist, Doc Samson. What else is ahead? Says PAD, "More developments with the Jamie/Monet/Skyn triangle, a trip to Paris, and a journey of self-discovery by Jamie." He explains, "Madrox has dupes (duplicates) scattered around the world, all living different lives. He knows where all of them are, because they share a psychic link. That's something we've been playing with: the idea that over time, his powers have been growing. Hey, where is it written that they must stay the same? So he sets out on a journey to find and reabsorb the wayward dupes, to literally pull himself together and incorporate his missing pieces."

If there's any one thing we can expect from future issues of *X-Factor*, it'll be unknown and the unpredictable, just like the title suggests.

You can pick up reprints of X-Factor *#1-6 in* X-Factor: The Longest Night, *collected both in Premiere Edition HC and softcover TPB, and* X-Factor *#7-12 in the* X-Factor: Life and Death Matters HC.

The Madrox mini-series that started the new, revamped X-Factor is collected in the Madrox: Multiple Choice TPB, *and for classic X-Factor action, check out* X-Factor Visionaries: Peter David Vols. 1-2, *all available now.*



MULTIPLE MADNESS: Meet one of Jamie Madrox' more excitable multiples! (From *X-Factor #12.*)

DAVID'S GOLIATH:

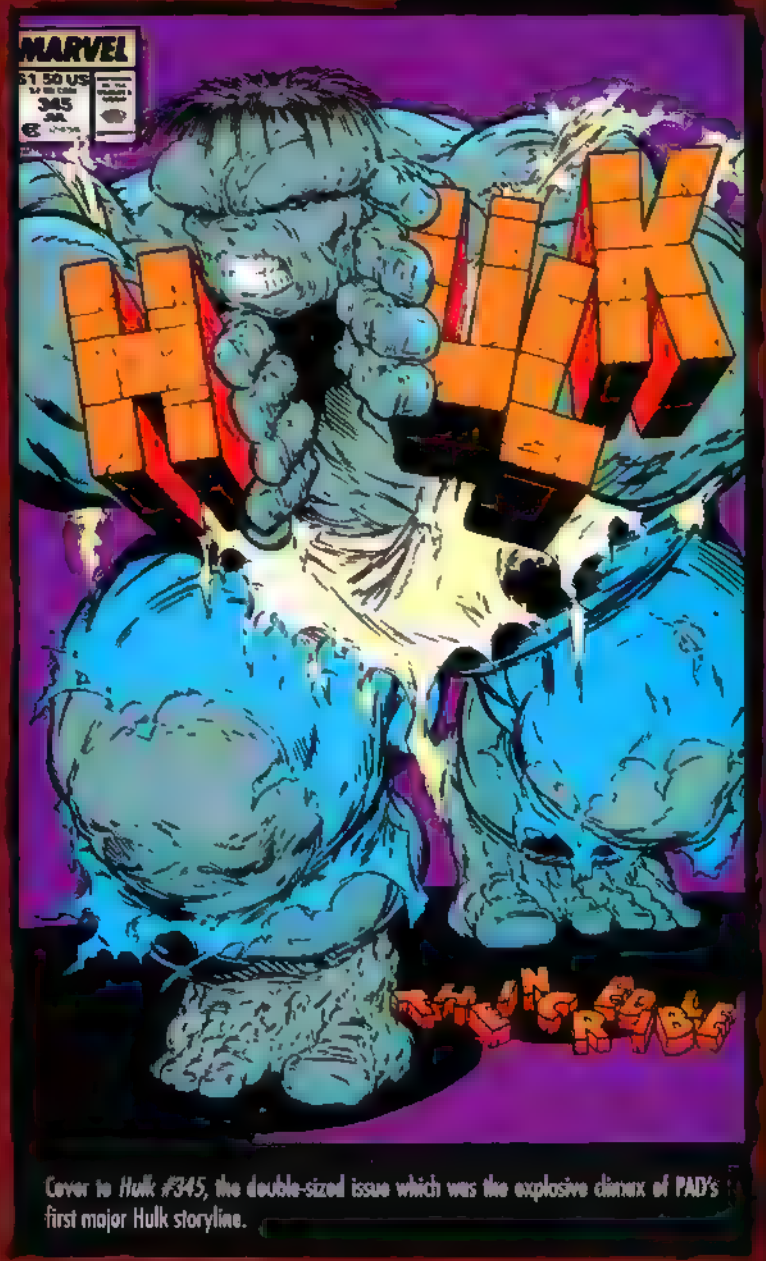
100 ISSUES OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK

While fans today know Peter David for his current output on critically-acclaimed titles such as *X-Factor* and *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man*, he made his mark writing what is arguably the definitive run on one of Marvel's inarguably greatest icons: *The Incredible Hulk*. *Spotlight* takes a look back at this 11-year opus, and how it shaped the character for future generations.

It was 1987, and Peter David had just come off a well-received run on *Spectacular Spider-Man*. He was hoping to land a Marvel assignment, but to that point had had no luck. Then word came that there was a need on the *Incredible Hulk* needed a writer.

The doldrums. Fans had become accustomed to pretty much the same old stories with the same old story patterns. The Hulk would show up in various environs, cause massive destruction and mayhem, [illegible] In fact, the *Hulk*'s status as one of Marvel's top properties had slipped to the point where he was no longer considered a highly sought after assignment. Writers wanted room to stretch their wings and make their mark, and the *Hulk* was not considered a place to do that. Enter Peter David.

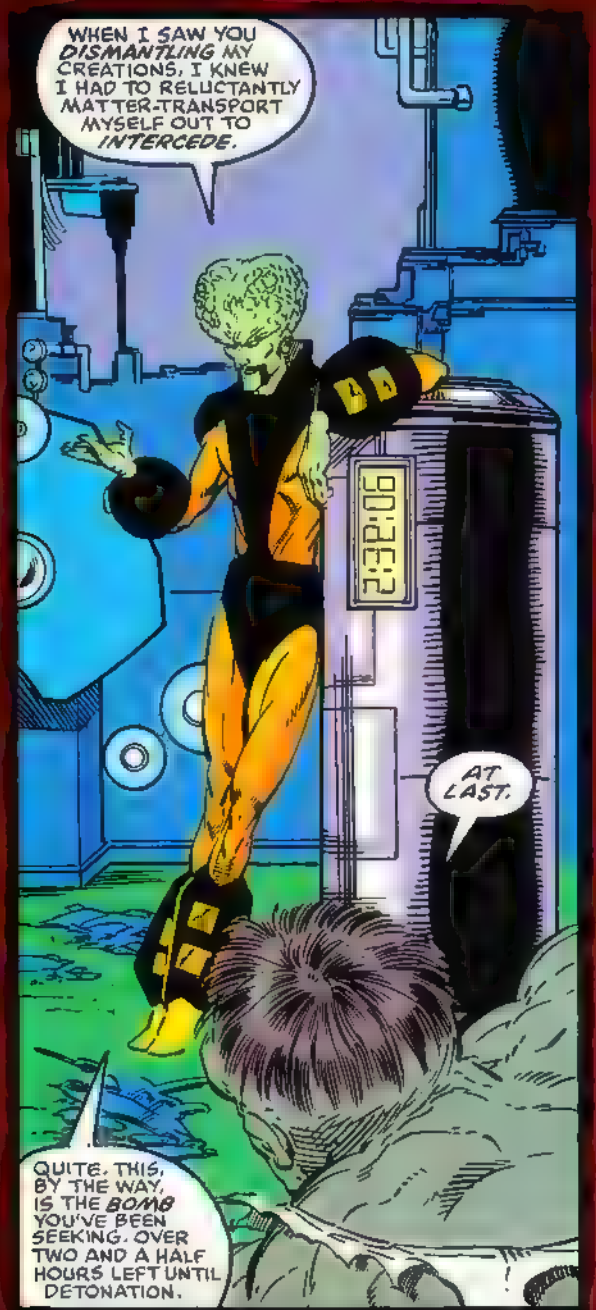
Transition onto the title was remarkably smooth. At the time, the *Hulk* was in the middle of a storyline where he'd returned to an earlier incarnation (traced directly to the seminal Hulk appearance in Lee/Kirby's *Incredible Hulk #1* from 1962); rather than [illegible] He retained an especially nasty attitude, however.



Cover to *Hulk #345*, the double-sized issue which was the explosive climax of PAD's first major Hulk storyline.

[illegible] interesting and different.

[illegible] Spider-Man, [illegible] Hulk Visionaries: Peter David Vol. 1-2 TPB series.)


WHEN I SAW YOU DISMANTLING MY CREATIONS, I KNEW I HAD TO RELUCTANTLY MATTER-TRANSPORT MYSELF OUT TO INTERCEDE.
2:32:06
AT LAST.
QUITE. THIS, BY THE WAY, IS THE BOMB YOU'VE BEEN SEEKING. OVER TWO AND A HALF HOURS LEFT UNTIL DETONATION.

THE LEADER: The Hulk's longtime arch-enemy unveiled in new form by PAD and Todd McFarlane in the pages of *Incredible Hulk*.

[illegible] Bruce Banner's childhood friend Michael Berengetti (aka Mr. G) realized something was unusual about his large and gray-skinned friend, he quickly appraised him as a valuable asset, considering his immense strength. Mr. G was involved in the Las Vegas underworld, and the Hulk became his bodyguard as well as security for the casino. The Hulk also hooked up with beautiful aerobics instructor Marie Chandler, who would play a big role in his supporting cast as PAD's run would evolve through the years. (The Las Vegas run is collected in *Hulk Visionaries: Peter David Vol. 3* TPB, for those who are still in continual future shock.)

A good situation for the Hulk couldn't last long, of course, and he was eventually on the road again. During a mystical encounter with his former Defenders teammate Dr. Strange, the Hulk's psyche was invaded, and he began to develop some very serious problems, even for a man with a penchant for turning into a giant monster. It eventually became apparent that there were three separate personas trapped within his mind: the childlike, savage, Green Hulk; the callously sardonic Gray Hulk; and Bruce Banner, the brilliant but emotionally reserved scientist. While each persona sought ferociously to be dominant, only one could take the fore at any given time, a delicately held together balance up until this point. But with the psychic tampering, all bets were off. The savage Green Hulk persona was raging to get out, and both Bruce Banner and the Gray Hulk sought to stop him.

The struggle began to have physical as well as mental effects, and Bruce's wife Betty and best friend Rick Jones together sought the help of psychiatrist Leonard Samson, who had experience in treating the Hulk. The question at hand was, where did all this rage come from? During the course of the storyline, PAD delved into Bruce Banner's childhood and found that he had been raised by a monstrously abusive father who had ultimately killed his mother. Exploring relationships with father figures has been a recurring theme in PAD's writing (see his *Captain Marvel* run), but as he points out, it's hardly restricted to him. "Father issues are a theme that appeals to a vast majority of American fiction. Even *Terminator 2* was essentially a story about a boy and his father."

As a child, Bruce had been forced to repress his rage at those horrific incidents...and on that fateful day of the gamma bomb test, that rage was released in the form of the Hulk. Says PAD, "The character really clicked for me when I realized that Bruce Banner was destined to be screwed up. The gamma radiation was simply the trauma that unleashed the problem that has always been within him. But something else could just as easily have unleashed it, and he still would have been an MPD [Multiple Personality Disorder]. He just wouldn't have been an MPD who could dropkick Sherman tanks!"

Samson correctly diagnosed that Bruce was suffering from Multiple Personality Disorder, and decided that the only way to help him was to effectively merge his three personas. With the aid of the reformed super-villain Ringmaster's hypnotic powers, the Hulk underwent a startling mental and physical transformation. With all three personas merged, he now has the size and strength of the Green Hulk, the personality of the Gray Hulk, and the intelligence of Bruce Banner.

The story was a huge turning point in the mythos of the Hulk, and one that had been building for a while. "When I started on the book, I had a general idea of the notion that the Hulk was a multiple personality. I knew that at some point in the future I wanted to do a story in which, under hypnosis, they merged Hulks. But I knew I couldn't do that immediately because when I started, they had just done a lengthy storyline in which Banner and the Hulk were split. So I said, enough with splitting him, enough with merging him, let's just deal with what we've got for now. But I knew that at some point, I wanted to get to that scene in *Hulk #377* when he exits Samson's office and says to Betty 'Honey, I'm home.' I had that picture in my head four years earlier. I knew that was the eventual payoff. But how I was going to get there, I had absolutely no idea."

But get there he did, and with the Hulk's newfound status, there was only one left for him to seek a purpose for his life. Previously, his only goal had been to survive, and to escape those who persecuted him. Now, apparently in control and able to apply his strength and

HEH HEH. IT'S CLEAR WE OVER-ESTIMATED YOUR INFLUENCE, MICHAEL.
IF WE'D KNOWN, WE'D NEVER HAVE TRIED TO KILL YOU. AS IT IS -- FEEL FREE TO LEAVE.
NO, YOU FEEL FREE TO LEAVE.
WHAT MICHAEL BERENGETTI SAYS, GOES.
AND HE SAYS YOU GO

HULK AKA MR. FIXIT. The Hulk finally has a skin he can feel comfortable in, from PAD's "Las Vegas."

intelligence towards any problem, what would he choose to tackle? The question was soon answered when the mysterious organization known as The Pantheon came calling. They introduced themselves as an international intervention group, a Peace Corps willing to use force to achieve its ends. Their leader, Agamemnon, invited the Hulk to join, pointing out the good he could do in the world, and in the process repent for his past sins. The Hulk accepted, and when Agamemnon left on a sabbatical of sorts, he appointed the Hulk as the interim leader of the Pantheon. Star artist Dale Keown joined PAD during this era.

During the Hulk's time with the Pantheon, they became involved in several politically-charged situations, among them freeing political prisoners, overthrowing dictatorships, and interjecting themselves into international crises. By this time, Rick Jones had met and fallen in love with Jen Fixit's old girlfriend Marlo, and the issues featuring Rick's bachelor party and his subsequent wedding to Marlo are widely considered classics ***(Hulk #417-418)***.

Standing [illegible] among those [illegible] in the Hulk: Future ***Imperfect*** two-part miniseries, illustrated by the legendary George Perez. It takes place during the Hulk's tenure with the Pantheon and features the conflicting [illegible]

[illegible] granddaughter [illegible] from the future to tell the Hulk a disturbing tale. He [illegible] worse in the future. Much worse. In her time, the Hulk is a brutal, tyrannical madman, ruling over the population of a terrified city with an iron fist. She pleads for his help both in stopping his future self, known as the Maestro, and in preventing that future from ever coming to pass. The Hulk travels into the future with her, and seemingly accomplishes his quest, though not without great cost. Yet the Maestro will return to haunt him again.

"It breaks me up that it says 'Hulk Visionaries'. It makes it sound like I knew what I was doing."

HULK: PAST PERFECT! All of PAD's classic Hulk stories are being reprinted in sequence in the *Hulk Visionaries: Peter David* series of TPBs. (Currently *Vol. 1-3.*)

THE HULK: THE END

Grand scheme or not, after eleven years, fans were crushed by PAD's departure, and never forgot his run, long clamoring for a return. They got it in 2002. Marvel had been publishing a series of stories featuring their iconic characters, entitled ***The End***. Each tale would show what was ostensibly the character's final story; if this tale was truly the last tale to be told. Recognized as the premier Hulk writer, PAD was approached to tell the Hulk's final tale. There was just one problem. He'd already told it.

Several years earlier, PAD contributed a short story called "The Last Titan to The Ultimate Hulk" prose anthology (no relation to the current Ultimate line). "The Last Titan" did exactly what ***The End*** series proposed; it told the "last" Hulk story, set in the far-flung future of a nuclear apocalypse, where the Hulk is the last (relatively) intelligent being left alive on Earth. PAD informed his editor of this story, and explained he didn't think he could top it as far as "End" stories went. So the solution was devised: "The Last Titan" would be adapted into graphic form, in the one-shot prestige format book ***Hulk: The End*** (a story recently reprinted in ***Giant-Size Hulk #1***). To top it off, ***Hulk: The End*** was illustrated by his longtime Hulk collaborator Dale Keown. The book was a smash success and sold out instantly. But although that may have been the "The End" for the Hulk, it was not the end of Peter David on the Hulk.

In 2005, PAD had a Hulk mini-series in development with Marvel. It was originally slated to be an ***Ultimate Hulk*** miniseries (yes, that Ultimate line), but eventually it was decided that it fit better in the regular Marvel Universe. Around this time, the regular Hulk title was undergoing a change in writer, and thus the mini-series, entitled "Tempest Fugit," was placed in continuity the regular series. And so, almost accidentally, what fans had sought for so long finally happened: Peter David was once again the writer of the monthly Hulk book! It was as much a surprise to PAD himself. "I was two or three issues into 'Tempest Fugit' before I learned it was going to be part of the ongoing book."

"Tempest Fugit" got a warm reception, and PAD remained on the book for nearly a year. He authored the ***House of M*** arc in which the Hulk found himself a member of an Australian aboriginal tribe, and two solo issues, one pairing him with his future ***Dark Tower*** collaborator Jae Lee, and the other reuniting him with Adam Kubert. "I enjoyed the run. One problem was that the initial arc was intended to be a limited series, and sometimes I think it would have worked better that way. Now, if they'd said to me 'Guess what? Bruce Jones is leaving, and we want you to take over the Hulk!', I would have done an entirely different story. What I would have done, I haven't the faintest idea. But I would have been thinking in totally different directions. As it was, I had to do some tinkering to have it fit into the ongoing series and flow out of the Bruce Jones run, and after that I had ***House of M***. So it was a little bit tricky getting traction."

HULK... GOD IN HEAVEN, LISTEN TO ME...
NO! FOR YEARS ... FOREVER ... HULK HAS LISTENED TO BANNER, AND BANNER'S FRIENDS, TALKING ABOUT HOW HULK RUINED BANNER'S LIFE!
HULK MADE BANNER'S LIFE! BANNER WAS NOTHING BEFORE HULK ... NOTHING!
IT'LL BE DIFFERENT, HULK! YOU'LL HAVE PEACE... FRIENDS...
HULK DOESN'T WANT FRIENDS, BECAUSE FRIENDS WILL HURT HIM. EVERYONE HURTS HIM. EVERYONE HURTS HULK.
HULK, FOR ONCE... SEE THE WORLD WITHOUT ANGER! SEE NOT WHAT IS, BUT WHAT COULD BE! SEE THE PLACE WHERE WE CAN... CAN...
...SEE... THIS PLACE... PLACE OF PEACE... HULK... CAN'T ST ...CAN'T THINK ...HULK... DON'T DO IT... LET ME GO... LET US GO... PLEASE...
NO! HULK WON'T LET IT HAPPEN! HULK DOESN'T WANT FRIENDS! HULK DOESN'T WANT TO BE WITH ANYBODY BECAUSE HULK JUST WANTS TO BE LEFT ALONE!

HULK: THE END: An instant sellout and one of the decade's most expensive back issues, PAD's *Hulk: The End* has recently been reprinted in *Giant-Size Hulk #1*.

Still, PAD says, "The issue I was most pleased with was the one that Jae Lee drew. That was the closest to what I wanted to do on an ongoing basis in terms of tone and style." "Tempest Fugit" and the Jae Lee issue are collected in the ***Hulk: Tempest Fugit TPB***, and the ***House of M*** arc and Adam Kubert's issue are collected in the ***House of M: Incredible Hulk TPB***.

Today, PAD has moved on to other assignments, but his work on the Hulk remains not only a significant milestone in his personal career as a writer, but also a huge part of the tapestry of Marvel history. You can experience it all in the aforementioned collections, and be sure to keep an eye out for future volumes!

FANS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

One of Marvel's editorial rising stars, presiding over titles like ***Thunderbolts*** and ***Amazing Spider-Girl***, Molly Lazer is also a card-carrying Stephen King fanatic. All eyes in the comic industry and beyond will be fixed on ***The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*** as it transitions Mid-World from Stephen King's novels to Marvel comics, and though she is not directly involved with the editing duties on the book, Molly is in a great position to see this project mature through its many stages of development! When ***Marvel Spotlight*** heard about her King fandom, we came not to talk to her as a comics insider, but as a simple fan...a fan in the spotlight!

CAT'S EYE: Molly and her cat Nissa are engrossed in the latest Stephen King bestseller (although Nissa does prefer Lilian Jackson Braun)!

Molly's list of favorite novelists includes Robert Cormier, Phillip Pullman, Neil Gaiman, and Jose Saramago, but it's her Stephen King fandom that has led to her largest collection of novels (which is easy to believe, since the guy is so darned prolific!). Her fandom started very early: "The first Stephen King novel I read was ***'Salem's Lot***, which I picked up in sixth grade. I don't think I'd read many books with vampires before that," says Molly, explaining how her enthusiasm for King's literary works was kindled. "The atmosphere that the book created was something that really appealed to me, and it felt like a very 'adult' book to be reading when I was in middle school."

After reading other King novels, such as ***The Shining*** and ***Firestarter***, like so many other readers, Molly was hooked. Naturally, her collection began to grow and grow, and over a lifetime of collecting it has formed itself into quite an odd shape (as you can see from the photo of her collection, a lack of consistency in her library may set her apart from the many fans who collect the comic titles she edits!). "The novels aren't all consistent in format, but by looking at them, you can tell where they came from: the hardcovers were given to me, the nicer-looking paperbacks I bought when they came out, and the more beat-up editions I bought at a secondhand store.

STEPHEN KING
STEPHEN KING
CELL
STEPHEN KING
STEPHEN KING
STEPHEN KING

DARK TOWER:
THE GUNSLINGER BORN
Seven Issue Mini-series
King • Furth • Lee • Isanove • David
Begins February 2007